

L. Stephens. Gift of the Author
1756 St. PETER's

CHRISTIAN APOLOGY -

AS SET FORTH

In a SERMON on 1 *Pet.* III. 15, 16.
lately published at the Request of the
Vice-Chancellor of the University of
Oxford and other Heads of Houses,
by *Thomas Patten* D.D. Fellow of
Corpus Christi College;

Farther illustrated, and maintained

AGAINST

The Misrepresentations and Objections of the
Rev. Mr. *Ralph Heathcote* Preacher-Assistant
at *Lincoln's Inn*.

By the AUTHOR of the Sermon.

O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE for S. PARKER and R. CLEMENTS,
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and Messrs. NEWTON in *Manchester*. M DCC LVI.

CHRISTIAN APOLLO

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St. Peter's *Christian Apology*, &c.

THE Author of the Sermon intitled the *Christian Apology* did by no means promise himself that what was offered in it would meet with universal assent or approbation. As it tended to overthrow those fortifications which would enable infidelity to wage eternal war against the gospel of Jesus Christ, he could not hope for any degree of candor, or even mercy from open or secret infidels. As little could he promise himself the favourable attention of many, at least, of those *professed defenders* of this gospel, who could not but see that if this plan of the *Christian Apology* were admitted, all that *rhetorical pleading* in theology was in danger of being *despised and set at nought*, which is so well calculated for procuring to divines the soothing character, in which, by the eagerness of some to obtain it, and the profound deference which is paid to it, one would think the whole merit of their profession were centered, the soothing character of ingenious, lively writers.

The gloomy prospect, however, of the reception which this attempt was likely to meet with, could be no discouragement to one who

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had

had no reputation to lose as a writer, nor was in the least ambitious of gaining one; and who, if he had been possessed of this reputation in the highest degree, would with joy have sacrificed it to the cause he had undertaken to recommend, the cause of *scripture-authority*, in opposition to the still-renewed assaults of infidelity; which the author is still convinced might long ago have been effectually repelled, if Christian writers had not joined issue with them upon a multitude of previous topical and abstract questions, concerning I know not what imagined reason and fitness of things, which naturally supply matter for endless disputation; nothing being more easy than to advance, and wrangle in support of, plausible arguments, (grounded upon our ignorance of God's secret counsels, or of some unknown circumstance in the nature of things, or of some past event partially revealed to us,) against the *wisdom, justice, goodness, expediency, fitness* of a variety of the acts and commands of God recorded in the holy scriptures.

Towards the beginning of the last century, the science of theology seemeth to have stood upon it's proper and steadfast foundation. It was then the praise of divines, that being convinced of the truth of the bible by it's credentials, of miracles wrought and prophecies fulfilled, they were, like *Apollos, mighty in the scriptures*, and were able, from a diligent and assiduous reading of the word, (*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*) to ascertain it's genuine doctrines, and
to

to declare to the people the whole counsel of God contained in it. And it was this noble plan of theological disquisition that produced those precious volumes, which one may venture to foretell, will outlive that flood of metaphysical subtilty which hath of late years overwhelmed them: The volumes I mean, of *Jewel*, and *Jackson*, and *Andrews*, and *Reynolds*, and *Hall*, and *Taylor*. Men who exerted themselves in the strenuous recommendation of the gospel of Christ, because they were perswaded that *it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*, and who recommended it to the serious attention of mankind by their lives still more than by their writings. But these glorious defenders of Christianity would have pitied, instead of abetting, the attempts of those writers, who undertake, with the shallow line of human conjecture, (the true name of reason *partially informed*) to fathom *the deep things of God*, and who concede to infidels, that nothing is to be received, even upon the authority of miracles, attested with a *singular strength of evidence*, as a revelation from God, which cannot, in all it's branches and articles be made appear, at least not inconsistent with the conceptions of man. Such attempts, I say, and such concessions they would have beheld with concern and pity, perswaded that the just measure of reasonable and unreasonable can only be had from a full and compleat view of all the main circumstances which attend the fact in question; since even in human affairs one person, who hath

been admitted behind the curtain, shall clearly and rationally justify transactions, which, to *a wiser man*, who is ignorant of the springs, and motives, and procedure of them, shall appear to be downright madness and folly.

They would therefore by no means have consented, as Dr. *Prideaux*, Dr. *Clarke*, Dr. *Rogers*, and indeed a cloud of modern divines have consented, that the *matter* of doctrines attested by miracles should be examined, before *the pretended revelation* be admitted as coming from God; not because they were disposed to admit any thing as coming from God which is absurd and unreasonable, but because a fact asserted in scripture, (the fall of man, for instance) may seem absurd and unreasonable to human reason not fully informed of all the facts and circumstances of it, which to the same human reason acquainted with all the merits of this cause, might appear in the highest degree just, and good, and fit, and reasonable, and necessary, and worthy of God; and must therefore be presumed to be so, upon the authority of miracles, appealed to in confirmation of it.

The not attending to this distinction, and (through neglect of it) admitting the decisiveness of reason alike upon subjects *partially* known, and *fully* known, seemeth to have led modern divines into that labyrinth of metaphysical reasoning, in which many judicious persons agree with the author of the *Christian Apology*, that it is impossible for them to gain ground upon infidelity; while the sum of their endeavours

vours to justify (as they, without hesitation, undertake)

To justify the ways of God to man^a, can at best amount to no more than this, that the reasons which they offer in justification of God's ways, *may possibly* be the very reasons by which the Almighty was guided in the transaction under debate. But as these advocates can alledge no *authority* for asserting that *these were his very reasons*, it is not likely, nor is it, indeed, reasonable to expect, that the infidel will acquiesce in them, however firmly they may stand upon their hypothesis. On the contrary, while he remaineth unchecked by a *decisive authority*, he will demand a hearing in *his* turn, at the bar of topical reasoning; and by laying down his own suppositions, which he hath the same right to do as the Christian advocate, will readily, by the help of a little ingenious refinement, overpoise the pleadings of his adversary, and give to his own side of the question the appearance of plausible. The debate will then, if it proceed, become a *rest of wit*, a meer rhetorical contest, and may extend to the filling of many volumes, without once touching upon the (unknown) stress of the question; as wide, on both sides, perhaps, of truth and *fact*, as if an Aristotelian and a Cartesian philosopher were engaged in fierce disputation, to determine whether some certain effect in nature is to be ascribed to the action of a *substantial form*, or of the *materia subtilis*.

^a Milton.

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While the champions for Christianity have been *thus* engaged in it's defence, and by such method of defence, have admitted that it cannot be proved by it's *miracles* to be a divine revelation, *unless Christians can evince* that the nature, ends and purposes of it are conformable, at least not inconsistent with certain supposed natural notions of religion and morality; the well-wishers to infidelity have, with no small pleasure, beheld the Christian cause undertaken upon a plan upon which they saw it could not be defended, so as *to render those inexcusable who should reject it*. They began to flatter themselves "that the truth or falsehood of it is a *problematical question*, about which the learned cannot agree; since tho' it's doctrines have indeed "the suffrage of miracles, yet miracles, may "possibly, even by the concession of Christians "themselves, be the work of evil spirits, and "therefore do not begin to be of weight to "prove the divine origin of the Christian dispensation, until certain previous points shall "be adjusted:" which, if ingenious infidels go on exerting their rhetorical talents against those of Christian advocates, will never be adjusted.

How much the weight, and authority, and efficacy of the word of God became weakened by placing it's authenticity upon this footing, will easily be seen, if we consider, that not only the *fitness and reasonableness* of the plan of our redemption and of all the facts appended to it, but also that of every precept of the gospel became,

came, by this means, triable at the bar of human reason. Partially acquainted as she is with the *history* of the *creation*, and *state*, and *destination* of mankind, every man was, by this theology, admitted to sit in judgment upon every command and institution of God, and to interpret it according to his own reason, that is, his own fancy or opinion.

Thus if our blessed Saviour hath instituted the sacrament of the holy eucharist, as a mean whereby we are to receive the body and blood of Christ as a principle of life, and strength, and refreshment to our souls, a reasoner pretending to have examined this institution by the principles of *sound understanding and common sense*, will presently tell us that it is altogether absurd and dissonant to reason to suppose that this ordinance can act upon us as *machines*, or any otherwise than by *recalling to our minds the rational motives* to love and thankfulness and obedience to God; and so, will induce his followers to give up all expectation of that life-giving communion with Christ, which he intended by this sacrament to convey to his faithful disciples.

Thus also if our blessed Saviour hath said — *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me :*^a it will be easy for a man to flatter himself that he is at liberty, notwithstanding this call, to indulge himself, and shun his daily cross. He may urge that it is absurd to suppose this pre-

^a *Luke 9. 23.*

cept was meant to extend beyond the first age of the church, or, if it be of *universal extent*, yet *reason and fitness* forbid us to understand it in it's *austere sense*; because he conceiveth it not to be consistent with the state and nature of *society*, or because it would be charging God with inconsistency to suppose him to caution us against the enjoyment of those good things which, he will tell us, it is evident from the constitution of nature, were created for our free use and pleasure. By this strain of plausible reasoning he will also set aside all those solemn warnings, that we *be not conformed to this world*; ^a that *if any man love the world and the things of it, the love of the father is not in him*; ^b that *the boastful pomp of life is not of the father* ^c — &c. Reason, I say, not overruled by the authority of scripture, nor by the account there given of the change introduced into the world and man's nature by his fall, might plausibly harangue against these precepts and cautions of the gospel, nor would the defenders of it upon the principle here opposed, find it easy to put her to silence — if, indeed, they should stand out against her arguments. Some there are who have not stood out, but taking their *ideas* of moral virtue and vice, not from the scriptures, but from the present state of man and nature, and the *measures* of them from the tendency of actions to promote or obstruct the temporal inte-

^a Rom. 12. 2.
βικ — v. 16.

^b 1 John 2. 15.

^c Αλαζονεια τῆς

rests of *civil society* and of it's individuals, ^a have erected that system of fashionable Christianity whose true picture the reader will find in the *Christian Apology*. ^b

Thus this *new method* of defence, this taking off the truth of the gospel from it's firm foundation of miracles, to rest it upon the unstable one of abstract reasoning hath in a great measure frustrated the important end and purpose of this wonderful dispensation. A new scene being thus opened for wit and invention, divines of parts and ability have been too strongly tempted to press in, *solem & pulverem*, into the field which was most filled with observing spectators, where glory and promotion were held forth, the prizes of ingenious subtilty, (as fanciful perhaps, tho' not so unfashionable, as that of *Scotus* and *Aquinas*) and uncommon quotations adduced with pomp and parade, to confirm the truth of — *The word of God*, already established by miracles wrought, and prophecies fulfilled! The quiet tho' abundantly more important province of *practical divinity* became, in the mean time, almost wholly desolated; and theology, the queen of the *practical*, seemed now converted into one of the *speculative sciences*; a view in which we have lately seen it seriously considered from the press. Addresses on the authority of

^a It is well known that sinners of whom the gospel pronounceth that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God, ^c have defended their crimes upon this plan, alledging that they violated no one's property, or had the consent of the proprietor.

^b P. 33. 2d edit.

^c *Ephes.* 5. 5.

scripture to the hearts and consciences of men were smiled at as *well-meant*, unfashionable things, recommended by no new observations or discoveries; and, in an age in which divines seemed to be as much exercised in the cause of Christianity as in any later age of the church, the practice of it's precepts remarkably declined. A defection from the ordinances of the church of Christ became every day more and more visible and extensive, and it was even pretended that the spirit of religion hath no dependance upon them, nay, that they serve rather to check and smother, than to advance it. *Faith in the Son of God* who gave himself for us, which, according to St. Paul, ^a is the life of a true Christian, was either depressed to signify a meer assent to certain facts, or, taken in it's scripture sense, was given up as a principle which human reason can give no account of, and therefore must discard as visionary and enthusiastical. In a word, instead of the *life-infusing*, ^b purifying principle of Christ's holy religion, a *religion of reason* had begun to be asserted, pretending, indeed, to accommodate itself to his blessed word, but, in effect, accommodating this word, in every doctrine and article of it, to the vain, rash, half-formed judgments of the human understanding: and, no longer confining itself to the task for which the Beræans are commended, the *searching the scriptures* to know *whether things be*

^a Gal. 2. 20.

^b John 6. 63. το πνεῦμα ἐστὶ τὸ ζωοποιεῖν —
 περὶ ῥημάτων αἱ ἐγὼ λαλῶ — πνεῦμα ἐστὶ καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶ.

[II]

so; but claiming a right to *search*^a how far they coincide with I know not what common notions or principles of natural religion, which principles tho' we should suppose to be ever so clear and evident, yet their coincidence or repugnancy with the facts and doctrines of the bible can never evidently appear, until the things of God shall be, what they cannot be unless he shall reveal them, compleatly known.

It was from a strictly attentive survey of this state of religion amongst us, that the author of the *Christian Apology* was induced to preach and print his sermon, that he might contribute his small share towards checking that *sceptical* spirit which, in his opinion, is sapping the foundations of religion, whilst it pretendeth to strengthen them; and which hath engaged the *chosen men*, who are best able, at least as far as preaching availeth, to inforce the practice of it, in vain, ineffectual fallies upon *infidels*, while *their leader*, the grand enemy of mankind, is left to ravage the citadel, the heart, almost without controul.

The text of *St. Peter* which was undertaken upon this occasion to be illustrated and enforced, was by no means, as the author of the sermon humbly conceiveth, unsuitable to his design, not only as it favoureth, if he have rightly interpreted it, his opinion concerning the true defence of Christianity, but also as it had been *violently pressed* into the service of the cause which he thought it his duty to oppose.

^a See Use of R. p. 35.

He hath endeavoured to shew, that the *Apology* which St. Peter in that text commandeth us, to be ready always to offer to every one that with meekness and reverence requesteth of us a conversation or *discourse concerning*, (not a *reason of*) the foundation of our Christian hope, that this *Apology*, I say, is a setting before the enquirer *a detail of facts, with their plain, simple, immediate evidence.*^a Such a discourse as St. Peter, being meekly and reverently, requested by Cornelius, made, as we read it, in the 10th chapter of the *Acts*; and such as St. Paul (being permitted *απολογεισθαι υπερ εαυτου*) maketh in several chapters of the same book. And the author may flatter himself that his interpretation of this passage is satisfactory to the learned, since though two attacks have been made on the sermon from the press, one of them hath not attempted, and the other hath offered nothing that availeth, to invalidate it.

The Rev. Mr. Ralph Heathcote, in a pamphlet entitled *The Use of Reason asserted in Matters of Religion*, hath these words on the subject of the criticism before us, “Dr. Patten affirms “that [the words] *λογον περι της ελπιδος* do not signify what the translators of the bible understood “them to signify, a reason of our hope, but only a “discourse concerning it; SO THAT when a Christian is asked upon what foundation his hope is built, “he is to give no answer at all, but only to set forth “what his hope is. This he calls the true Christian “Apology, and has made it the business of a sermon

^a Serm. p. 5.

“*to prove it so.*” Upon which false representation he triumphantly exclaimeth “that every man of common sense must discern at once, that the religions of *Mahomet* and *Confucius* if they were ten times as absurd as they are, might both be defended upon the same foundation: for the disciples of each would have nothing more to do but to declare and set forth the systems of their respective masters, and adhere with firmness and obstinacy to them.”^b

The citation given above from the 5th page of the sermon, will immediately shew the unfairness of this representation; nay, Mr. *Heathcote* himself will shew it, who, summing up the amount of Dr. *P*’s sermon, maketh one of the particulars of it to be, *That the true and proper foundation of the gospel is the miracles it records, because miracles are facts, and facts the only [sure] ground of all our reasonings; upon which account we should always* IN OUR DISPUTES *with unbelievers content ourselves with insisting upon the miracles alone.*^c Let the candid reader determine, whether he, by whom it is asserted that a sermon recommendeth *reasoning* and *disputing* with infidels by the allegation of miracles, can, with any sense or consistency affirm, that the writer hath, in that sermon *made it his business to prove*, “That when a Christian is asked upon what foundation his hope is built, HE IS TO GIVE NO ANSWER AT ALL.”

An occasion will hereafter occur, of accounting for this inconsistency of Mr. *H*’s representation

^a P. 5.

^b P. 6.

^c Use of R. p. 17.

tations in this case; when, for his comfort, he will be acquitted of the charge of dishonesty which might seem on this account to lie against him.

The other writer, who calleth himself a member of the University, hath indeed offered several observations in abatement of our interpretation of this passage of *St. Peter*.

1. He urgeth that the word *αιτεω* is made by *Mintert* to signify not only *to request*, but also *postulo, ad judicem provooco &c.* We may answer, that the *Christian Apology* hath no where confined this word to any particular mode of asking. The word is used in ancient authors to signify either a modest request, or an arrogant demand: all that the sermon asserteth is, that *αιτεω μετα πρᾶντης καὶ Φοβᾶς* is *to request with meekness and reverence*.

2. He accuseth the *Christian Apology* of having referred the words *μετα πρ. καὶ Φ.* to *αιτεω*, at the distance of *seven* words interposed. The *Gentleman* did not perhaps observe that, according to his own and the common way, of referring the words *μετα πρ. καὶ Φ.* to the word *ετοιμοι*, there will be an interposition of *fourteen* words; a suspension of the sense which, as this interposition is not parenthetical, is hardly to be paralleled in any creditable prose-writer, antient or modern; at the same time that the construction of the words as represented in the *Christian Apology*, is easy and natural.

3. He alledgeth that in the 40th verse of the 19th chapter of the *Acts*, the word *λογος* beareth

eth that very sense which the *Christian Apology* asserteth it never to bear in the *New Testament*, viz. *the internal, inherent ground or reason of things*.

In answer to this he must be informed, that *αποδυνααι λογον*, the phrase used in this 40th verse, constantly and uniformly importeth the laying the state of some transaction or course of transactions before a superior or constituent, when he calleth upon us to *give up our accounts*, and to shew how we have employed or disposed of the power or the talents with which he hath intrusted us. Thus in the case before us, the town-clerk was *charged with the power* of keeping peace and good order in *Ephesus*, and was therefore solicitous to appease a tumult which he could not justify, *μηδενος εως αιτιας*, there being no cause of it, which, if he were called upon by his superiors, he could set in ballance for *exonerating his charge of the power* committed to his trust, which he had suffered to be infringed and diminished.

So again, *All things are naked and open in the eyes of him* *προς ου ημιν ο λογος*,^a [*αποδωσιμους*] of that supreme judge to whom we must give up our accounts; before whom all the transactions of our lives must be laid open, that it may be seen whether we have disposed of those *talents* which he hath committed to our *stewardship*, for his honour and service, or have indolently wrapped them in a napkin, or riotously squandered them away upon our lusts.

^a Heb. 4. 13.

We have another apposite illustration of this just sense of the phrase, in the parable of the unfaithful steward,^a who when accused to his lord that he had wasted his goods, is thus called upon: "How is it that I hear this of thee? ἀποδος λόγον της οἰκονομίας." I require thee to give up "the accounts of this stewardship." His lord doth not require him to defend his villainy, nor to assign the grounds and reasons of it; he knoweth him to be guilty, and hath resolved that he shall be no longer steward.

Thus much may suffice to establish the assertion of the *Christian Apology* which this Gentleman hath attempted to overthrow; viz. that in the New Testament the word λόγος NEVER signifieth a reason in the sense which that word beareth in the bible-translation of this verse of St. Peter; tho' the candid reader will observe, that whatever might be the signification of the word λόγος in other contexts, yet the main assertion of the *Christian Apology* would still remain unshaken, viz. that λόγος ΠΕΡΙ της ἐλπίδος can only signify a discourse CONCERNING hope; a reason concerning hope being an expression which no sense nor language can admit.

There is nothing else in this pamphlet which beareth against the *Christian Apology* or its author, besides gross, low-bred railing; and for this the Gentleman hath this author's hearty and sincere forgiveness, and would deserve, if unchristian rancour could deserve, his thanks, as his name is, on this occasion, joined with two o-

^a Luke 16.

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thers, in company with whom he esteemeth it an honour to be vilified, as he is perswaded that neither the community, nor the University, nor the church of *England* can boast of two more useful, exemplary, blameless members.

Let us then proceed, 1st to illustrate and maintain what the sermon hath asserted to be the scripture-plan of the *Christian Apology*; and

2. To examine the arguments which he hath alledged in opposition to the doctrine contained in the sermon.

1. The *Christian Apology* consisteth, as hath been asserted, in setting forth, after the example of *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* and other original apologists, the plain message and declarations of God, the doctrines and proceedings recorded in the bible; and appealing for their divine origin, to those very miracles to which these teachers of them appealed, as proofs that God had sent them.

Thus when *Moses*, the messenger of God's first written dispensation, is sent by *Jehovah* to the *Israelites*, we read that he delivered his divine message by *Aaron's* mouth, who, as he had been before instructed, "cast down his rod before them, and it became a serpent; and he put forth his hand, and caught it by the tail, and it became a rod in his hand. And he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out behold it was leprous, as snow. And he put his hand into his bosom again, and plucked it out of his bosom, and behold it was turned again as his flesh. And he took

“ of the water of the river, and poured it upon
 “ the dry land, and the water which he took
 “ out of the river became blood upon the dry
 “ land.” See *Exod.* 4. 1—9. and v. 28, 30. These
 were the miracles which were exhibited, by
 God’s command, as the credentials of *Moses* and
Aaron to the children of *Israel*. Let us now
 enquire what effect these signs had upon the
 minds of that people, when the *elders*, who
 were the only eye-witnesses of them, reported
 them *Exod.* 4. 29. We read in 31st verse of this
 chapter — *And the people believed; and when they*
heard that the Lord had visited the children of Is-
rael and looked on their Affliction, then they bowed
their heads, and worshipped. Upon the confir-
 mation of these miracles, which *they did not see*,
 they yet believed the promises of God, set forth
 in the 3d chapter of this book of *Exodus*. We
 read of no demur made by any single Israelite
 crying out, in the language of the *infidel-lord*,
 “ *If God would make windows in heaven might this*
thing be; or alledging that these miracles might
 be the work of evil spirits, or be impostures,
 and therefore proposing to enquire, by abstract
 ratiocination, whether this message were not in-
 consistent with common sense, with common
 notions, with the measures of probability, with
 the reasons of things, with fitness, with any
 manifest truths, natural or moral, with his no-
 tions of the divine attributes, with *the pure and*
clear deductions of reason in the first and simplest
principles of all morality and religion. ^b No. The

^a 2 Kings 7. 2.

^b Use of Reason, p. 11, 12.

probability, fitness, expediency &c. of the contents of the divine message was acknowledged by the people on the decisive authority of the miracles themselves. And no wonder; seeing they were pitched upon for decisive (as every one at least who calleth himself a believer must acknowledge) by Jehovah himself. And upon the same authority of miracles *related*, did numbers of the faithful among this people admit all the laws and revelations which were afterwards communicated to them, without *falling almost into Atheism* thro' a want of discerning the (undiscernible because unrevealed) grounds and reasons of them which might *clear the Deity from* [the imputation of] *arbitrariness, caprice, or fantastic humour.*^a They obeyed these laws *implicitly*, as the efficacious discipline of God for purifying their hearts, and rendering them meet to be partakers of the Redeemer's atonement, tho' they could not see, nor ever demanded to see the precise grounds and spiritual operation of each of them. Nor must we by any means allow to Mr. H. that divines *have justly supposed a right explication of the grounds and reasons of revelation to be the best and only means of recommending it to the world;*^b which is denied, not so much because the epithet *only* will necessarily exclude the epithet *best*, as because God hath not thought fitting to indulge to mankind such an insight into his secret counsels, as is requisite for explaining the grounds and reasons of his revelation. Every article, without doubt, of his

^a P. 61.

^b Use of R. p. 60.

several dispensations is built upon reasons infinitely wise and good, but where God hath been silent concerning them, there, to undertake the full display of them is at best an ill-judged act of piety. However therefore “the excellent “*Spencer*, and *Maimonides*, and the learned Dr. “*Warburton* may have discovered great reading “and abilities in their endeavours to explain and “illustrate the Mosaic ritual and dispensation, “with a view of vindicating the ways of God to “man,” it is by no means true that *all have agreed that the undertaking was rational and well-grounded.*^a The result of such attempts can, at best, rise no higher than to the title of *probable conjecture*, which will maintain it's reputation only so long, 'till some more learned or more plausible writer shall ingeniously advance a different hypothesis.

Let those commands, then, and ordinances of God whose grounds and reasons he hath not, himself, explained, nor directed us to explain, by an evident analogy,^b be received with the implicit obedience and reverence of faith; and let the reader judge whether the amount of this doctrine be, what Mr. *H.* hath represented it, *That tho' God hath spoken to his creatures, and in an extraordinary manner too, yet they must not dare to pay so much attention to Him as to understand what He hath said.*^c As if it were necessa-

^a Use of R. p. 61.

^b As in the case of many types in the law of *Moses*, and in the history of the Old Testament.

^c Use of R. p. 62.

ry to our *understanding* any command or declaration of God, that we should clearly see the *grounds and reasons* upon which it is founded ! Enough is it for us to be assured, as his goodness hath assured us, of the general tendency of all his ordinances, to the spiritual improvement of those to whom they are proposed ; the peculiar adaptedness of the medicine to the case of the patients, and it's precise mode of operation, it is not needful nor perhaps in our present state possible for us to be informed of.

It hath appeared, from a plain representation of facts recorded in the book of *Exodus*, that the first of the written revelations of God was, by his command, enforced *wholly upon the credentials of miracles* ; and how they who acknowledge the truth of this revelation can consistently think it necessary to examine it by any other test than that which he hath appointed, it is not easy to say.

Let us enquire in the next place, on what foundation the messenger of God's *second* revelation undertook to establish the divinity of *his* commission.

And here we find that our blessed Saviour hath all along appealed to miracles and Prophecies (which are, indeed, in their completion, a species of miracles) as bearing witness that he is sent from God, *Search*, saith he, *the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.* * Again, *The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness*

a John 5. 39.

of

of me.^a Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very work's sake.^b If ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him.^c And the same power of working miracles by which our blessed Saviour ascertained the divinity of his mission, was, for the same purpose, according to his promise, communicated to his followers. "God bore them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the holy Ghost."^d He "worked with them, and confirmed the word with signs following."^e

Agreeably then, to the declarations and procedure of Moses and Jesus Christ, and St. Peter, and St. Paul, the author of the *Christian Apology* hath ventured to assert, that the Christian religion, so far as it is recommendable to the understanding, (for *another principle* must recommend it to the heart) standeth upon the foundation of miracles wrought and prophecies fulfilled; which, when plainly alledged upon the warrant of the histories of the old and new Testament, do demand an implicit assent to the doctrines they are adduced to confirm for divine, and do altogether supersede all abstract speculations, all reasonings *a priori* concerning fitness, probability, grounds and reasons, or concerning the correspondence of the doctrines with common notions, or the principles of a supposed natural religion.

^a John 10. 25.
2. 4.

^b 14. 11.

^c 10. 38.

^d Heb.

^e Mark 16. 20.

This he hath asserted, not because he judgeth it right to admit any proposition as true, upon any authority whatsoever, which is really and manifestly contrary to fitness or common sense, nor because human reason is blind or powerless; this the author hath never pretended, but hath, on the contrary, allowed that reason is sufficiently qualified, in certain circumstances, for the discovery of truth; under which circumstances her conclusions will and must be irrefragably true: but he hath asserted it because in all reasonings concerning fitness, wisdom, justice, goodness of any supposed procedure of God, human reason is necessarily weak from the want of proper *data*, however strong within it's proper limits, as an eagle's eye would be weak if it should attempt to look into the kingdom of heaven.

In this province, where *facts* are wanting, reason, not having her proper materials to work withal, is compelled to have recourse to imagination and conjecture, and to proceed upon a certain *supposed* nature of things, to which the truth might perhaps, if she could get an insight into the hidden *facts and realities of nature*, be found altogether disconformable. Some circumstance might, in this case, discover itself, which would utterly overthrow the plausible reasoning which had been built upon an utter ignorance of that circumstance.

This observation rightly attended to, may serve compendiously to set aside the whole train

of infidel-objections against the several articles of the Christian faith, which, being reasoned upon in an ignorance and misconception of the secret realities of God and nature, the only proper *data*, have induced infidels to call in question his justice, wisdom, goodness, or to charge him with arbitrariness, caprice and fantastic humour: but then it will alike shew the vanity of all those justifications, however well designed, of these articles, which proceed upon a *like* ignorance of those realities, and alledge ingenious conjectures in their behalf, instead of *the decisive authority of the word of God*, confirmed by the miracles to which it hath expressly appealed.

For supporting and illustrating the above important observation, the author hath asserted, that no reasoning, however just and cogent, can tend to the discovery of *real* truth, which is not founded in clear, known *facts*: and he hath ventured farther to assert, that the *knowledge of facts can never come into the mind by any contemplation or comparing of abstract ideas*, nor by any other than these two ways, viz. 1. *ordinarily* by the *mediate* or *immediate* testimony of the senses; or 2. *extraordinarily*, by *mediate* or *immediate* communication from God.

In this way of considering theological subjects, as facts known to us either *ordinarily* by

a *Mediate testimony* is that of eye-witnesses, *immediate*, is that of our own senses.

b *Moses* knew certain facts by *immediate* communication from God, we know the same facts by *mediate* communication from God, i. e. by the mediation of *Moses's* history.

the

the *mediate* testimony of sense, or *extraordinarily* by *mediate* communication from God, the science of theology will be profitably confined to the divine code itself, and such learning as tendeth to open the true meaning of it. All that will need to be enquired will be what it is that the bible maketh known to us; and all the argument which a Christian will want, will be this short one, "that the scriptures are evinced by the miracles (to which they constantly appeal as to their credentials) to be the word of God, and are therefore to be implicitly embraced." No half century will again be trifled away in stating how far a certain *internal evidence* must be settled, before the *external* can begin to operate; nor will the great abilities of men who, with the scriptures in their hands, would *mightily convince*, be lost in those *rhetorical pleadings* against infidels, which vainly, however piously, have sometimes attempted to unveil the hidden grounds of God's counsels, and to assign reasons for his acts and institutions not warranted by his word; at the same time that the *pleaders* will readily confess their ignorance of the motives and reasons which regulate the actions of their next neighbour. Nothing will *then* be pretended to be known of divine things, but what God hath thought fit to *make* known, and all the task of his ministers will be their genuine task, of setting before the people *his statutes and ordinances*, and earnestly admonishing them to *observe and do them*.

It must not, however, be hoped that this desirable point will soon be gained. While the present mode of *philosophising in religion* prevaieth, while reputation and promotion continue to be the rewards of ingenious subtilty, and while a considerable number remain whose studies have been chiefly bent on *metaphysical theology*, it must be expected that an attempt to recall the clergy to the apostle's *foolishness of preaching*, will, by many, be received with that scorn and contempt which was thrown on the preaching of Christ crucified by the *philosophick Greeks* in the days of *St. Paul*, and therefore the genuine *Christian Apology* will with most appearance of success be recommended to the *rising generation*.

For their sakes, let us now proceed to vindicate the sermon which inculcateth the principles now set before the reader, from the exceptions of *Mr. Ralph Heatbcole*.

My general complaint against him is that he is, of all the writers I ever looked into, the most unfair and disingenuous. The *Christian Apology* hath advanced no position without a reason assigned for it. *Mr. H.* where he hath made just citations hath never once considered the arguments advanced in support of them. But indeed he hath given very few of these just citations. The passages pretended to be taken from the *Christian Apology* he hath for the most part patched up, (mangling both the expression and meaning all the way) from a number of pages widely distant, the first part of the citation be-
ing

ing, once at least, taken from the last of those pages and the close of it from the first of them.* The candid reader will soon convince himself of the truth of these allegations, by examining the *flight* of citations from the *Christian Apology*, in any one page of Mr. H's book.

We must leave to his own conscience that savage, faucy, farcaistical acrimony of stile which he hath *somewhere or other* learnt to substitute in the place of argument; nor will it be needful to undertake a formal refutation of several very extraordinary positions in his book, unless indeed to mention them be to refute them: viz. that *the*

a Use of R. p. 8.

b To save the reader the trouble of the examination ~~above~~ recommended to him, I will here produce one specimen of Mr. *Heathcote's* manner of quoting, which may intimate with what degree of confidence his quotations are to be relied on.

Speaking of Mr. *Hutchinson*, "This extraordinary person," saith he, "as he has been already described by his followers, was "a very true, and a very serious Christian; one who never offended with his tongue; never spake with more warmth than "was strictly justifiable; and never discovered any thing in his "behaviour, but what was the fruits of a well-grounded faith." Let us now fairly cite the passage as it standeth in the preface to the late edition of Mr. *Hutchinson's* works in 8vo, p. 11.

"The editors, who were for many years intimately acquainted with him, do from their hearts believe those reflections to be groundless, having seen enough in him to be fully convinced of his being inwardly a true and serious Christian; nor "ever seen any thing in his behaviour, but what was the fruit "of a well-grounded faith, the consequence of his great knowledge of the evidence of Christianity, and his insight into men; "his knowledge, as we call it, of the world. That he never offended with his tongue; never spoke with more warmth than "is strictly justifiable; that an unguarded expression never dropped from his mouth, WE SAY NOT."

c Use of R. p. 85 and 97.

purpose of revelation was not to form a new creature. That the chief use of miracles was not to confirm doctrines, but to excite attention — That plain genuine sense is the good ground upon which alone the seed of the gospel will bear fruit. He hath entirely forgotten the honest and good heart which our blessed Saviour hath made to be this good ground.

All then that will require to be here considered will be

1. His misrepresentations of the *Christian Apology*.

2. His allegations against what it hath really advanced.

I. The misrepresentations may be classed into such as arise 1. From malice. 2. From ignorance. His first malicious misrepresentation is, That the sermon is animated with an excessive bitterness of spirit, and it's doctrine delivered in a contemptuous dogmatical strain. Of this latter charge he hath alledged no proof: of the former he pretendeth to alledge two instances.

First, a peculiar malice and rancour against the clergy. In Mr. H's note at this place, "He describes, saith he, the present clergy as idolaters of reason, &c. He represents them as men who wear the form and garb of religion but are estranged from it's power and spirit, &c." — That some of the clergy have been liable to the imputation of all those fatal princi-

a P. 32. See 2 Cor. 5: 17. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. b Note, p. 78, 79. c P. 17, 18. d Use of R. p. 18.

ples and practices which are enumerated in this note from several parts of the sermon, Mr. *H.* himself will not I presume deny. But it no where appeareth that they are charged indiscriminately upon the clergy. The author is so happy to be perswaded that great numbers of them detest and lament those principles and practices as heartily as he himself doth.

If the author of the essay on criticism is right in the passage cited below, these monstrous principles, with others closely connected with them, made their first appearance in this nation in a reign in the last century; and tho' they have lamentably flourished, however powerfully discouraged, in our own times, yet as a proof that the author's just reprehension of them was not received as a rancorous accusation of the present clergy, he may boldly appeal to the thanks and request delivered to him in the convocation-house by the *reverend* magistrate who presided when the sermon was preached, and to the personal request of other *reverend* heads of houses

a Mr. *Pope*, having justly censured the taste for vile obscenity which flourished

In the fat age of pleasure, wealth and ease,
goeth on thus.

The following licence of a foreign reign

Did all the dregs of bold *Socinus* drain;

Then, unbelieving priests reform'd the nation,

And taught more pleasant methods of salvation,

Where heav'n's free subjects might their rights dispute,

Least God himself should seem too absolute.

Pulpits their sacred satire learnt to spare,

And vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there.

Encourag'd thus, wit's *Titans* brav'd the skies,

And the press groan'd with licens'd blasphemies.

for

for it's publication. He might also appeal to many other testimonies. God forbid that the *present clergy*, or the hundredth part of them, should be liable to the censure which the author hath (not singularly) charged upon the present age, and upon some of it's clergy! Mr. H's second instance is that Dr. P. hath *publickly reviled the magistrate*; and to support his charge, he hath cited a passage from the sermon which the author of it freely referreth to the judgment of the candid reader: let him decide whether the magistrate is there reviled, or whether Mr. H. be not a malevolent and false accuser.

Let us proceed to such of his misrepresentations as proceed from *ignorance*.

In mentioning the plan and tendency of the *Christian Apology*, he hath, all along, accused the author as stifling, exploding human reason and it's powers and exercise; as avowing "that we are to give no reason of our hope;" and "that Christianity cannot be founded on argument;" as not suffering men to examine, but exhorting them only to believe. As labouring with all his might to represent *reason, or the dictates of common sense, as no better than the suggestions of the devil*.

Mr. H. is freely acquitted from the charge of *malice* in all these gross misrepresentations, which arise from no other cause but *ignorance* of the nature and sorts of reasoning. He did not know,

^a Use of R. p. 101.

^b P. 4.

^c P. 14.

^d P. 16.

though

though placed in a *society of reasoners upon facts*, that adhering to, alledging, insisting upon facts is *reasoning*; and therefore, very consistently with his own conceptions, accused him of exploding the exercise of reason who asserteth, that in recommending the gospel to men's assent, we have nothing more to do than to insist on the miraculous facts expressly appealed to in confirmation of it.

This opposition which Mr. *H*'s understanding hath set up between the *insisting upon fact*, and *reasoning*, may be seen in many a triumphant passage of his book. The title-page is not free from it. "The Use of Reason &c. in answer to a Sermon &c."

Here Mr. *H* hath plainly supposed, that the sermon asserteth reason to be of *no use* in matters of religion; when the whole purport of the doctrinal part of this sermon is, to employ reason usefully and effectively, by confining it to it's proper province in religion, and restraining it from attempting to work upon *imaginary materials*, on which it's most earnest labour would be altogether thrown away.

Again, in Mr. *H*'s 4th page, one part of the plan of the sermon is said to be to *preclude all reasoning whatsoever*, and only to *adhere firmly and obstinately to facts*: which *adhering to facts* can mean nothing else than *insisting upon them as proofs or arguments*.

Again p. 7, he hath asserted it to be Dr. *P*'s view "to strengthen the foundation of the gospel
" by

"by *contracting* it to *facts*, which he thinks "hath been greatly weakened by being *enlarged* "on *reasoning*." Here, the placing the foundation of the gospel upon facts, i. e. making facts the foundation of it's credibility, a procedure which hath always been held a weighty species of argumentation, is by Mr. H. flatly opposed to reasoning.

I will only produce one other of those passages where he hath committed the same mistake, opposing the *founding of reasoning upon facts*, to *reasoning*. "Dr. P. affirms that we "ought to proceed — not by presuming to reason, but by attending to facts. Whatever reasonings, saith he, the gospel needeth — are "founded upon the sure basis of fact. Behold "the fortress of a Christian's reasoning! &c." Thus, saith Mr. H. "all appeal to reason is entirely precluded, all reference to doctrines, forbidden, — and Christianity is left to stand upon "the single evidence of it's miracles." So it did with Nicodemus, who yet irrefragably appealed to reason when he said, "Rabbi, we know that "thou art a teacher sent from God, for no "man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him."

After so many specimens, and more might be given, of Mr. H's unacquaintedness with the

a Mr. H. in his 69th page, hath totally altered his mind about this matter. This Doctor, saith he, while he fancies himself an able champion for the gospel, by *enlarging it's foundation*, — is only ruining the cause he means to defend.

b Use of R. p. 41.

c John 3. 2.

nature

nature and force of reasoning, we are not to be surprized if his attempts in this way shall be found weak and confused.

H. All his allegations, however, that stand in opposition to the doctrine of the sermon shall be examined with patience and exactness, this being the second part of our task proposed.

It is the doctrine of the *Christian Apology*, that all divine knowledge cometh by communication from God, and that it is an idle, fruitless task to examine and compare our own *abstract ideas* for finding out him or his ways and purposes, beyond what he hath revealed of them. That it is therefore arrogance to demand, and presumption to attempt a reason for all the steps of his procedure, in the creation, government, and redemption of mankind, necessarily ignorant as we are of those *facts and realities*, by which alone they can be properly justified.—That when a revelation is proved to come from God, it's precepts and doctrines are to be implicitly believed and obeyed;—and that, with regard to the gospel-revelation, the miracles to which it appealeth, are decisive proofs of it's divine origin.

In opposition to this doctrine Mr. H. would prove, 1. that certain principles of a natural religion are written in every man's heart; and 2. That these principles are the test by which we must examine all pretended revelations, in order to know whether they be divine.

His first proof of the existence of natural religion is drawn from an *antecedent necessity*. “In

E

“ order,

"order, saith he, to know and embrace a revelation, we *must previously* be endued with powers which are capable of understanding what it sets forth, and of comprehending the terms in which it is conceived." ^a That creatures to whom God revealeth himself, must be endued with understanding, and capable of being spoken to, is most certain. Nothing can be communicated to a creature destitute of ability to understand it so far as it shall be communicated; but Mr. H. hath not considered what wild consequences will follow from his assertion, That "I am perfectly incapable of understanding the revelation, unless I have antecedently within myself some general notions of the articles which it containeth." ^b Thus, saith Mr. H. if a revelation treateth of matters which relate to the being of a God — I must previously know that such a being exists — or else I can by no means comprehend the revelation." ^c Let us pursue this principle in some farther instances, and it's wildness and absurdity will be glaring. If a revelation treateth of the *triune subsistence* of God, of the *eternal generation* of the Son, and the *eternal proceeding* of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, I must previously know that such persons do subsist in the Godhead, and also, have *antecedently* within myself some general notions of a *triune subsistence*, of *eternal generation*, and of *eternal proceeding*: if a revelation treateth of the *spiritual death* of our first parents by transgression, and of a new *spiritual birth* by

a P. 27.

b Ibid.

Jesus Christ, I must previously have ideas of this *spiritual death* and of this *new spiritual birth*— or I am perfectly incapable of understanding the revelations. Now tho' an infidel may adopt this principle, and boldly reject these articles of revelation because he hath no *antecedent notions* of them, yet I presume Mr. H. a church of *England* clergyman, will not admit the *consequences* of his assertion, but will acknowledge the truth of these mysterious articles of the Christian faith; however he have hastily here advanced a principle which would lead him, as it leadeth infidels, to deny them.

Having now, to his own apprehension, clearly proved that what he hath said of this *antecedent necessity* of natural religion is not chimerical and fantastic, he proceedeth to confirm it's *real existence* by revelation itself.

(1) In order to prove from scripture that this natural religion, (that is, in his account, "the dictates of common sense in all matters of duty to God and man, including a knowledge of God's existence and attributes,"^d) that this religion is in our hearts previously to any revelation, he alledgeth that passage in the first chap-

a. If these illustrations from scripture doctrines should not be relished, the reader may try how Mr. H's principle will hold in matters of *human communication*, and ask whether a scholar must be perfectly incapable of understanding geometry (for instance) unless he have *antecedently within himself* some general notions of a scalenum, a rhombus, a parallelogram, an ellipsis, a parabola &c. Is it not enough that the scholar have capacity for entertaining notions of these terms *after* they are explained?

b P. 59.

c Use of R. p. 29.

d Ibid.

ter to the *Romans*, which we will here produce at large. "That which may be known of God is manifest to, or in, them (the Gentiles,) for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise they became fools &c."^a

From this famous passage, four propositions may be plainly collected;

1. That God did actually reveal to mankind the knowledge of his own existence and attributes, *to whom he has revealed himself* — *to whom he has revealed himself*.

2. That he directed them to bear in mind his infinite power and glory and goodness by *considering the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he hath ordained, the earth also and the sea and all things that are therein.*

3. That thro' the perverseness and vanity of their hearts they fell away from the knowledge of the true God, *who giveth to all men life and breath and all things, and held the truth (the general truth that there is a God) in unrighteousness, transferring his glory to graven images, and, tho' they ran madding after multitudes of Gods,*

the idolatries of the nations round about them: yet
^a *Rom. 1. 19 &c.*

yet having no fear, no knowledge of God THE CREATOR.

4. That because they were *all guilty before God*, and without excuse for this their falling-off, who, from the awakening memorials of his power and glory, which in his creation he had spread before them, might if they had *liked it*, have *retained*, what they had, from revelation, *received*, the knowledge of the true Creator-God, therefore he was angry with them, and *gave them up unto those vile affections* and corruptions (largely described in this and in the 3d chapter of this epistle) which were the natural fruits of their defection from him.

Can it, now, be inferred from this text of St. Paul, that the natural powers of man are capable of investigating the being and attributes of God? Is not *this* rather the true inference suggested by it, "That the human mind, in it's fallen state, is so far from a capacity of investigating divine truths, that it hath a perpetual tendency to *obscure and corrupt them*, after they have been *clearly revealed from heaven*?"

This conclusion doth not rest only upon the case, represented by St. Paul, of the whole *heathen* world, where the *natural powers* were in their *natural state*; it is, in a more peculiar manner, established by the history of the *Jews*, among whom those natural powers were in a state of *divine discipline and cultivation*: By the frequent cautions given to this people against the idolatries of the nations round about them: by their actually falling into the grossest idolatry,

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1. That God did actually reveal to mankind the knowledge of his own existence and attributes, *to ywovv tē Oē — eDavgwv.*

2. That he directed them to bear in mind his infinite power and glory and goodness by considering the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he hath ordained, the earth also and the sea and all things that are therein.

3. That thro' the perverseness and vanity of their hearts they fell away from the knowledge of the true God, who giveth to all men life and breath and all things, and held the truth (the general truth that there is a God) in unrighteousness, transferring his glory to graven images, and, tho' they ran madding after multitudes of Gods,

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This conclusion doth not rest only upon the case, represented by St. Paul, of the whole *heathen* world, where the *natural powers* were in their *natural state*; it is, in a more peculiar manner, established by the history of the *Jews*, among whom those natural powers were in a state of *divine discipline and cultivation*: By the frequent cautions given to this people against the idolatries of the nations round about them: by their actually falling into the grossest idolatry,

try, immediately after all the wonders which their eyes had seen, and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, and the thunderings and the lightnings of the Lord their God; and this, while *Moses* was, on their behalf, in conference with him in the mount, whither the prophet had gone up, in the cloud of the glory of *Jehovah*, which the eyes of this people had seen for seven days, like devouring fire, on the top of the mount.^a And lastly this conclusion is established by the lamentable state of religion, even in this enlightened age, and by the present fatal blindness of many, to the true spirit and design of Christianity.

(2.) The *whole purport and tenor of the gospel* is next appealed to by *Mr. H.* as making it evident "that these principles of natural religion must be previously implanted in us, as the genuine foundation and support of revelation;"^b and we are told, that "we learn from the books of the old and new testament that the intent and purpose of revelation was, (among other things,) to restore man to the free use and exercise of those powers which he had before; to restore to their original purity his natural notions, (which were, by the fall, grown corrupt and abominable, and darkened with habitual error) and to regulate and correct the obliquities of his depraved will. And our Saviour, saith he, may be said, in more senses than one, to have given sight to the

^a *Exod.* 24. 17.

^b *P.* 31.

"blind,

“blind, strength to the lame, and to have opened the ears of the deaf. But he never pretended to give sight to men who wanted eyes; to enable men to walk without the use of legs &c. These contradictions and absurdities were reserved for the new-fashioned divinity of this age, which would teach us that he came to inculcate supernatural truths before there were any natural, or in other terms, that natural religion is no foundation of revealed.” This argument is of the rhetorical kind, and doth not so closely and clearly infer it’s intended conclusion as one could wish. But a conclusion is really and plainly deducible from it’s premises, which effectually overturneth the proposition they were calculated to establish.

For if, by the fall, the *understanding* of man was so *darkened*, if *error had oppressed him so entirely*, that Jesus Christ, in restoring him, might be said to have given *sight to the blind*, then, certainly, no *principles remained*, in this *error and blindness* of his understanding, to be a *foundation and support* of that *revelation* which Jesus Christ came to offer.

Mr. H. hath therefore, himself, beforehand given us a refutation of what he affirmeth in the very line following: “Secondly I affirm that these natural notions, or principles of natural religion, God’s first revelation, must be our primary guide [to] and ultimate test of every other revelation that shall succeed it.” By his own account in this very page, his guide

a P. 33.

b Ibid.

is blind (and lame too,) and *if the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch?*

Mr. H's affirmation just now cited, is not pretended to be supported by any argument; nothing is attempted in this way from this 33d to his 40th page, where, after much flourishing of his pen *in the air*, he seemeth to address himself earnestly to the combat.

"The question is, saith he, how shall we know the Christian religion to be indeed a revelation? I say, by *examining* first into the reasonableness of it's doctrines and of the ends it proposes, whether they be, at least not contradictory to any manifest truth, natural or moral. And when I have thus laid the groundwork and foundation, and have discovered that *it may be* a revelation for any thing that reason urges to the contrary, I then proceed to try whether it *is so*, by enquiring into the reality of it's miracles &c. This would be my manner of proceeding."

Tho' one might make some demurs to the decisive authority here claimed by Mr. H. for those *principles and common notions* which he hath here stiled *natural and moral truths*, I would yet willingly, for peace-sake, submit that what is offered as a revealed truth be examined by the clear principles of reason, if this examination, this comparing of the ends, purposes, doctrines of revelation with those principles were not evidently impracticable, (as hath often above been intimated) by reason of man's incurable ignorance of those ends, purposes, necessities, connexions,

nexions, dependencies, on which the acts and ordinances of God are founded. Were it an article of revelation that the fixed stars are suns, you would laugh at the philosopher who should demur to this article, till he could compare the properties of the fixed stars with the known ones of the sun. You would tell him that God hath given us as much knowledge of the fixed stars as is necessary or useful for us to know, but not enough to enable us to pronounce decisively how far their properties coincide with those of *the luminary of our own sphere*, though the revelation ought to *assure us* that they do, in all points, coincide. Let us reason thus upon the subject of *comparing rational knowledge with real revelation*; persuaded that *as much of the latter is explained to us as is necessary or useful for us to know*, but not enough to enable us to pronounce decisively, *how far it's articles coincide with those of rational knowledge*; tho' at the same time we ought to be satisfied of their *real coincidence with it*, God having given *assurance of it to all men*, by miracles wrought in confirmation of them.

Mr. H. however, is still bent upon *examining*. But Dr. P. affirms, saith he, that we "ought to proceed in an *utterly inverted order*, "*not by presuming to reason, but by attending to facts*."

If Dr. P. had really called this an *inverted order*, he would have been justly chargeable with nonsense; he would have been liable, as we

have seen above, to the same charge, if he had *thus* opposed the *attending to facts to reasoning*.
 “Now I do *affirm*, proceedeth Mr. H. in flat
 “*contradiction to this Doctor*, and will here un-
 “dertake to prove, that miracles, thus absolute-
 “ly and singly considered, are not sufficient to
 “establish the divinity of the gospel.”^a

Here, then the controversy advanceth to a crisis, and Mr. H. who hath hitherto dealt chiefly in quotations, insolent invective, and loose harangue, is now to give a specimen of the strength and clearness of his reasoning faculty. He is to prove that those *miracles, for the sake of which our blessed Saviour demanded to be believed, are not sufficient*, (even in conjunction with the great miracle of the resurrection) *to induce our belief*.

1. His first argument is drawn from the nature of assent. “This assent is always proportioned to the degree of probability: we never rest satisfied, on any evidence whatever, in a firm belief of any fact, till we have previously examined the reasonableness on which it is grounded. Now as miracles are the most *improbable* of all facts that are not impossible, so they require, not only the strongest testimony from men, but likewise the most apparent *reasonableness* in themselves, to make them credible.” Such are Mr. H’s premises; let us add the conclusion they are designed to evince—*therefore* “Miracles, absolutely and singly considered, are not sufficient to establish the di-

^a Use of R. p. 41.

"vinity of the gospel!" Any other conclusion in nature is equally deducible from the premises, supposing one could make any sense of Mr. H's *reasonableness of improbable facts*.

In truth, this author forgot the question he had undertaken to dispute upon, the moment after he had proposed it. This question, stated by himself in the close of his 41st page, is not, *What is it that rendereth credible the testimony given of a miraculous fact?* (this is an enquiry concerning the grounds of credibility;) but *whether miracles, wrought in confirmation of the divinity of a doctrine, be, singly considered, a proof of that divinity.* Mr. H. evidently supposeth the reality of the miracles, but affirmeth them not to be a *sufficient proof*: "I do affirm, saith he, in flat contradiction to this Doctor, that miracles, absolutely and singly considered, *are not sufficient to prove the divinity of the gospel.*" This affirmation is very justly set in the opposition of flat contradiction to this Doctor, who in his sermon hath asserted, "that the miracles of the gospel, singly considered, *are a sufficient proof of it's divinity.*" Let us then keep this affirmation of Mr. H. in our view, and proceed to his next argument in support of it.

2. "If outward testimony was sufficient of itself to evince the credibility of miracles, (as this Divine contends^a in regard to those of the

^a This Divine hath not once, thro' his whole sermon, pleaded for or mentioned the *credibility of miracles from outward testimony*, or from any other consideration whatsoever, having all along taken it for granted.

“gospel,) then all miracles must be received
 “as equally credible, where the circumstances
 “which attest them are equally valid.”^a

Here, now, is another *wide wandering*—from the question concerning the *validity* (as proofs) of *miracles acknowledged*, to the question concerning the *credibility of miracles disputed*. Mr. *H*’s affirmation was, That miracles will not *establish the divinity of the gospel*, and to confirm it, he is undertaking to prove that *outward testimony will not evince the credibility of miracles*.

His reasoning however, tho’ utterly beside his purpose, is more intelligible here than in the preceding argument; and as it hath set the attestations of *popish miracles* upon a level with that of *any other matters of fact*,^b and really tendeth to give the testimony of *Philostrophus* an equal weight with that of an evangelist or apostle,^c it highly demandeth to be considered.

We will not fear then to affirm, what Mr. *H*’s present argument supposeth the *Christian Apology* to admit by it’s principles, *That all [asserted] miracles must be received as equally credible, when the circumstances which attest them are equally valid*. The credibility of facts asserted, is measured by the credibility of the witnesses attesting those facts, and by that only. And hence Christian divines, down to Mr. *H*. have generally instituted *trials*, not of the *ends and purposes* of the

^a Use of R. p. 43.

^b He saith of popish miracles, that we shall find some of them as well attested as any matters of fact can possibly be. Use of R. p. 44.

^c Ibid. p. 43.

gospel miracles, but *of the witnesses*, in order to evince the reality of those miracles. And the characters and lives of these eye-witnesses, together with the seal of their blood set to their attestations, have always, by Christians, been esteemed decisive in favour of *their* testimony, so as to give it the precedency to all other human testimony concerning any facts recorded in any other history.

Let this author then, seriously reflect how wild, how rash it is to infer, that supposing the sole criterion of the reality of past facts to be (as indeed it is) human testimony, *the authority of a Philostratus or a Bernard becomes of equal weight with the authority of an evangelist or apostle.*

The ancient adversaries of Christianity might indeed *think they saw a force in the argument here alledged* by Mr. H. and might “attack the miracles of the gospel, by confronting them with “miracles which *they affirmed* to be equally authentic.”^a but did they *really*, as he asserteth, *see a force in it?* and *were* their miracles *indeed equally authentic* with those of the gospel?

This question we may suppose Mr. H. to answer in the affirmative, (as he hath affirmed the same thing of *innumerable popish legendary miracles,*^c) and that he groundeth the superior credibility of the miracles of the gospel, on the excellency of it's doctrines, ends, and purposes.

^a Use of R. p. 43.

^b Use of R. *ibid.*

^c P. 44. Were we to descend, saith he, from pagan to popish legends, we should find innumerable miracles, as strongly affirmed and *as well attested, as any matters of fact can possibly be.*

Accord-

According to this principle, the *miracles attributed to Apollonius*, for instance, being by Mr. H. allowed to be equally authentic with those of an evangelist,^a would, if his doctrines, ends and purposes had been worthy, and some of them are not unworthy, of an evangelist, have been equally credible with the miracles of the gospel: they would have ceased to be hearsay stories, dressed up a hundred years after the supposed age of *Apollonius*, into a kind of novel for the entertainment of the historian's patrons.

In the mean time we will not be afraid to assert, that the miraculous facts of the gospel have *therefore* an higher degree of credibility than any other historical facts, 1st *because* their historians were all eye-witnesses of most of them, not relating a single fact which some or other of them had not seen with their eyes and heard with their ears: and secondly *because* they renounced this world and all its joys and promises, and underwent a series of cruel persecutions, and even death itself, in adhering to the facts they had attested, and to the doctrines whose divine origin those facts had first recommended, as the spirit of God afterwards confirmed it, to their faith.

These joint-circumstances make up that *singular strength of evidence*, by which the miracles of the gospel come attested to us, and which no testimony concerning any other historical facts whatsoever, can parallel.

^a Use of R. p. 43.

3. Let us proceed to Mr. *H*'s third argument, which hath not indeed, like it's fellows, mistaken the point in debate. For if we are really cautioned, (as this argument pretendeth to have proved,) *by the express authority of the scriptures themselves, against resting the truth of Christianity upon the simple testimony of it's miracles,*^a then Mr. *H*'s affirmation must be true, *That miracles, singly considered, are not sufficient to establish the divinity of the gospel.*

Where, then, do the *scriptures* expressly caution us against resting the truth of Christianity upon the simple testimony of it's miracles? If Mr. *H*. can prove this, he will help infidelity to a compendious and effectual method of overthrowing the scriptures, since we have produced many passages, wherein Jesus Christ resteth the truth of Christianity upon the *simple testimony* of it's miracles; upon which footing it was likewise placed by his apostles; so that, in this case, the gospel will be found to stand in the opposition of *flat contradiction* to itself.

The paragraph^b in which Mr. *H*. hath asserted this extraordinary proposition, adduceth in proof of it three texts of scripture, containing,

1. A caution of our blessed Saviour, not *against resting the truth of Christianity upon the simple testimony of it's miracles*, but against going after false christs and false prophets.

2. A caution of St. *Paul* against giving heed to St. *Paul* himself or an angel from heaven,

^a Use of R. p. 46.

^b Ibid. p. 45.

preaching any doctrine different from that of the gospel; supposing, not granting, that it were possible for an angel so to preach.

3. A caution of St. *John* against believing every spirit, because many false prophets, anti-christian spirits, were gone out into the world. Try therefore, saith he, what manner of spirit they are of; try whether it be the spirit of God, by the touchstone (not of eternal, unchangeable fitness, but) of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For, "hereby, addeth St. *John*, know ye the spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world."^a

Let the candid reader now, or let Mr. *H.* himself, determine whether any of these three texts of scripture do *caution us in the most explicit terms, against resting the truth of Christianity upon the simple testimony of it's miracles:*^b nay whether they caution us against any thing else, than the forsaking of the gospel, supported as it is by it's miracles, and of Jesus Christ, it's blessed author, upon any pretensions whatsoever.

Proceed we now to Mr. *H.*'s fourth argument. It's undertaking is, to prove that *miracles, exclusively of any appeal to doctrines, could never prove the divinity of the scriptures, because these miracles will, in this case, want proof*

^a 1 *John* 4. 1—3.

^b P. 46.

*themselves.** One would have thought he might have kept his right track, when he was got into it in the stating of his third argument; but he hath once more run away from it, and hath strayed, as in the two first arguments, into an *ερεοζήτησις*, an entire *change of the question*. His *affirmation* so often referred to, in support of which these five arguments are drawn forth, *supposeth* the miracles of the gospel *sufficiently proved*, but *denieth* their *validity*, singly considered, *to prove* the divinity of the gospel; and his third argument, which we are just come from examining, proceedeth, as we have observed, upon that *supposition*. But here he hath relapsed again, in supposing the miracles to want that full proof, which, in his *affirmation* and in his third argument, he conceded to them.

Let us, however, take the argument, so stated as we find it, and enquire whether it be conclusive.

“Miracles, saith he, exclusively of any appeal to doctrines can never prove the divinity of the scriptures, because they are attested only by those scriptures: for such a proof would be no other than an arguing in a circle. I believe the scriptures to be divine because they are confirmed by miracles; and I believe the miracles to be divine because they are attested by the scriptures. Is not this dancing finely in a round?”^b

If this be, indeed, a conclusive argument, the reality of the gospel-miracles must fairly be given

a P. 46.

b P. 46, 47.

up as incapable of being proved. For if the miracles are insufficiently attested by the scriptures, *exclusively of any appeal to doctrines*, then they will remain insufficiently attested by the scriptures, *inclusively of any appeal to doctrines*, whose excellency cannot alter the nature of the attestation, which will continue insufficient if it was so before; so that the argument will still remain *in a circle*. The miracles are matters of fact, and therefore are only proveable by evidence; and they have no other evidence than the attestations of the eye-witnesses, the gospel-historians. Either, therefore, the miracles must be given up, as not supported by sufficient evidence, or the gospel evidence is sufficient, and Mr. H's argument fallacious. The latter, thank God, is the *true* member of our disjunction; let us proceed to detect the fallacy of his argument, alleging that *to rest the proof of the divinity of the scriptures upon the miracles, is to argue in a circle*. In proof of this allegation, he hath set forth, as Dr. P's, the circular argument above cited. But this argument falsely and fallaciously representeth the reasoning insisted on by Dr. P. which is this: I believe the scripture *doctrines* to be *divine*, because they are confirmed by miracles which no man could do except God were with him; and I believe the *miracles* to be *real*, because their reality is attested by the strongest testimony that ever confirmed past facts, the testimony of the gospel-historians.

Mr. H's fallacy lieth in not distinguishing between the *scripture-doctrines* and the *scripture-history*,

history, but using the word *scriptures* in two different senses, conceiving or pretending them to be the *same* sense. Attend to this distinction and the argument, confused by Mr. H. will become direct, and clear and natural.

1. The *scripture-history* attesteth the miracles of our blessed Saviour and his apostles, therefore they are *real*; and no being, except God be with him, can so change the course and order of nature, as the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles did, therefore they are *divine*.

2. These miracles were wrought in express confirmation of the divine origin of the *scripture-doctrines*, therefore these *doctrines* are of *divine origin*.

Let us here embrace a fit occasion for obviating an old objection, hinted at by Mr. H.^a against the validity of the bible-miracles as proofs of the divine mission of those who wrought them, drawn from a supposed power of evil spirits to work miracles, which power is said to have been particularly exercised by *Jannes and Jambres*, and by *Simon*, called the *Sorcerer*.

On this subject let it be observed 1. That, supposing God to have permitted these persons to perform miracles as real as those of *Moses* and the apostles, yet (not the excellency of ends and purposes but) the very contest itself served to prove the divinity of the miracles, which

^a In a passage (p. 45.) transcribed almost *verbatim* from *Prideaux's Letter to the deists*, who reporteth it as alledged by the *opposers of the gospel*.

these magicians^a withstood. Those of *Egypt* owned themselves outdone by the *finger of God*,^b and attempted no farther competition. And *Simon* who had long (the word is ἐξεστραχεναι, not bewitched but) astonished the people of *Samaria* with magic wonders,^c was himself astonished (ἐξίστατο) at the miracles and mighty works of *Philip*, and convinced by them.

2. Let it be observed secondly, that though we should allow that evil spirits can work miracles, it will still remain an unshaken truth, that most, at least, of the miracles of *Jesus Christ* being acts of compassion, and charity and beneficence, will by the very nature of them be evinced to be of divine origin. The tree is known by it's fruits, nor can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit, nor a malevolent spirit, such acts as imitate the divine philanthropy and kindness. And miracles which cannot proceed from evil spirits will, I conceive, be acknowledged to come from the *father of spirits*.^d

3. It is not so evident as hath been thought, that evil spirits *have* the power of working miracles, i. e. of changing the order and course of nature. Had not the scripture been alledged as

a Μαγισται is applied to *Simon*, *Acts* 8. 11.

b *Exod.* 8. 19.

c Μαγευαις, uncommon natural phenomena.

d They who allow to evil spirits such a power over nature as was requisite for performing the miracles of our blessed Saviour, a power equivalent to that of creating, cannot consistently urge any other natural argument to prove that the *creation itself* is not the work of evil spirits, except the *signatures of beneficence and goodness upon it*.

ascribing this power to evil spirits, nothing would more strenuously be insisted on by the Christian reasoners *a priori*, than that nature must always continue in the hands of it's creator, and that none of his creatures can any more exert a power equivalent to the creative, than they could create themselves. And I would humbly offer it to the consideration of the learned, tho' the present argument doth not stand in need of this supposition, whether the acts of the Samaritan and Egyptian magicians, or those foretold by our blessed Saviour and St. Paul rise any higher in the scripture account of them, than to the character, by which the two latter are marked, of *signs and wonders of falsehood* and strong delusion,* contrived for deceiving.*

We come now to Mr. H's fifth and last argument, which undertaketh the proof of this very singular proposition, "That miracles alone, instead of persuading men to embrace Christianity *the firmer*, must insensibly lead them "not to embrace it at all."^a And if they *do* thus lead men astray, I agree with him that it must be *insensibly*, for their *direct aim* is certainly at another, contrary effect.

From the terms of his proposition, that *miracles alone must insensibly lead men not to embrace Christianity*, would any one conceive his drift and meaning was to prove, that *we should be ob-*

a 2 Thess. 2. 9, 10. σημειοις και τερασι ψευδους — εν απωτη.

b v. 11, ενεργειαν πλανης.

c Mar. 13. 22. σημεια και τερατα ως το επιπλαυν.

d P. 49.

liged to reject the miracles of the gospel? yet this is the very close and result of the argument instituted to prove his proposition; as the reader may convince himself by casting his eye on the top of Mr. H's 53d page. If therefore he have proved his point, he hath proved *That miracles alone must insensibly lead men to reject miracles.*

It would be a consolation to those who lament the dreadful prospect of professed infidels, if Mr. H. would exert his wonderful new talent of *establishing* (instead of the old trick of *destroying*) things by their *contraries*, in demonstrating, what would be, in effect, the converse of his conclusion, that the *rejection* of the gospel must insensibly lead men to the gospel.

This small embarrassment of our author might here, with all that belongeth to it, be dismissed, if it were not necessary to clear the author of the *Christian Apology* from the suspicion of having a hand in it, Mr. H. having set out with promising his readers, that *Dr. P. shall prove*^a his proposition for him.

All the quarrel of this argument seemeth to point at those assertions of the *Christian Apology* which relate to the *knowledge of facts*, and it's importance to just, conclusive reasoning.^b That this knowledge is the only steady basis whereon conclusions can be firmly erected — That with such knowledge, no efforts of reason, no comparing of her abstract ideas, can furnish her — That God may, indeed, *extraordinarily* infuse it, but *ordinarily* it can come into the mind by no

^a Use of R. p. 49.

^b P. 16, 17.

other way than by the *mediate, or immediate, testimony of the senses*. And accordingly, as it was God's intention to communicate certain *facts* to us, concerning himself and his acts, and concerning the past history, and future destination of mankind; he signified such of them as were *ordinarily* known to the eye-witnesses, by the declaration of those witnesses: and such of them as were not thus ordinarily known, those he signified to us by his Son, and by his apostles and prophets, *authenticating their message by astonishing and awful miracles*.

So far then, according to the doctrine of the *Christian Apology*, as facts relating to divine things are made known to a man, 1. By sense; or 2. By credible testimony; or 3. By immediate inspiration; or 4. By credibly communicated inspiration, so far he is enabled to reason with strength and confidence: but if he desert these guides, and undertake to build vindications, justifications, demonstrations, delineations relating to God or man, not upon clear known facts, but upon his own brain-formed ideas, however clear and distinct, however closely and compactly linked together, such performances, after all his pains, will justly claim the titles of fancy, conjecture, chimera.

Against this *representation* Mr. H. hath offered no exceptions. He hath indeed *mistaken it*, and conceived it to run thus. "Just reasoning
" can alone be built upon the knowlege of facts,
" which *can only be acquired by the testimony of*
" *our senses*: all reasoning not so built, is spe-
" cious

“cious declamation. Miracles therefore, being
“known facts, are the only basis whereon we
“can erect the proof of Christianity.”

Now this is wisely urged! saith Mr. H. “It
“is true, addeth he, that in matters of *natural*
“enquiry we build conclusions upon *sensible*
“*facts*; upon experiments testified by our sen-
“ses; but miracles are such facts as we know,
“not by the testimony of *our own*, but by that
“of *other people’s* senses.” “Our own senses are
so far from shewing us miracles, that they only
shew us those facts, that ordinary course of
nature to which miracles are directly contrary.
And therefore if only *facts testified by our senses*
were to be admitted as the foundation of our
reasoning on Christianity, miracles could be no
proof at all of the truth of it, but must
be rejected, as not confirmed by the testimony
of our senses.”

This is Mr. H’s argument *clearly* and faith-
fully represented. And the candid reader will
perceive that it proceedeth upon two, wilful or
unwitting, misrepresentations.

1. It supposeth the *Christian Apology* to assert,
that the knowledge of facts can only be acqui-
red by the *testimony of our senses*; leaving out
the words *mediate or immediate* which in both
editions of the sermon stand before the word
testimony,^a and evidently mean, in connection
with it, the testimony of *our own* or of *other*
people’s, senses.

^a Serm. p. 17.

2. It pretendeth, that, from the *consideration* “that we cannot reason surely or effectively but “upon the ground of facts,” the *Christian Apology inferreth* “that we should rest the truth of “Christianity upon it’s *miraculous facts*.” Whereas this proposition, however asserted in the sermon, is not there asserted *in consequence* of the above *consideration*, nor supposed to have any connection with it.

Of this the candid reader will be convinced, who shall be pleased to turn to the 16th and 17th pages of the sermon. There, the author, in order to shew (what he had undertaken to shew^a) the inability of the understanding to come at *real truth* by abstract reasoning, hath asserted that the only path to this *real truth* is the *knowledge of realities and facts*; since the most successful comparing of such ideas as are not known to have any thing in nature correspondent to them, can only furnish the mind with *chimerical propositions* instead of *real truths*: that this knowledge of facts and realities can, *ordinarily*, come into the mind no other way than by the *mediate or immediate* testimony of the *senses*: that, consequently, *reason* cannot discover them;^b and *accordingly*, i. e. agreeably to this *consequence*, God did not leave it to *reason* to find out those realities which it was necessary

^a Serm. p. 13.

^b How vainly then, as well as needlessly, have divines who might and ought to have appealed to the authority of the scriptures, and to that only, attempted the proof of several articles of the Christian faith upon certain fanciful principles of reason!

for us to know, concerning his nature, his acts, and purposes; but communicated to us, as well those which could be attested by sense, as those which lie beyond the reach of it, “by declarations made to us by his Son, and by his apostles and prophets,” who, that we might believe them to be sent from God, and might *implicitly* receive their informations, stamped them with the divine, authentic seal of astonishing and awful miracles.

I will not exclaim in the language of Mr. H. “What shall we say now to this assistant-preacher of ours?”^a But I will say, that this gentleman having, as he conceiveth, gained a compleat victory, first by the help of a disingenuous quotation, and secondly by mistaking, or wilfully misrepresenting the point in question, insolently closeth this fifth argument, with giving his adversary the *hard name* of *cabalistic theologue*, and wondering at his indiscretion “in venturing out of his thickness of cover into the broad, open paths of nature and common sense.”

Mr. H. having now, as he conceiveth, sufficiently established his point, proceedeth next to offer an observation or two “which cannot fail *but* greatly to confirm it.”^b

The first of them is intended to demonstrate, after the modern, rambling fashion of *demonstrations*, “that the gospel is founded on, and “its purity preserved by, the principles of natural religion.”

^a P. 80.

^b P. 70.

This demonstration consisteth of an heap of arbitrary assertions concerning the first establishment and progress of Christianity. "From all which, saith he, it is reasonable to conclude that as the gospel is founded on the principles of natural religion, so it's purity can only be preserved by a continual application of the same principles."

His second observation standeth in some opposition to the former. When the principles of common sense and reason are *there* made the true foundation of the gospel, one would have thought this author supposed those principles to be naturally in the mind, as Mr. H. hath often pronounced them to be. But in this second observation they are, all on a sudden, vanished. Where, now, is his "religion of nature, written on the invisible tablet of every man's heart?" This heart is become a mere *rasa tabula*; you must help it to the *λογισμὸν ἐννοίας*, you must lay in it the foundation of natural religion, (i.e. "the dictates of common sense, for natural religion, according to Mr. H. is nothing else,") if you would raise the superstructure of revelation.^a When you have thus stored a man's mind with these dictates, these common notions, he will then proceed to apply them as a test of revelation. But you will never make him a Chris-

^a P. 76. Mr. H's pattern here, was the author of the Tale of a Tub. Undertaking to account for a curious phenomenon, "there is, saith he, in human nature a certain * * * * *

* * And this I take to be a clear solution of this matter.

b Use of R. p. 29.

c P. 29.

d P. 76.

tian unless you first *make him a reasonable man.* * Could Mr. *Hutchinson* himself have given a more unfavourable account of the state of man by nature? and would not such an account, if it had occurred in *his* works, have made a figure among the scraps which Mr. *H.* hath, truly or falsely, cited from him, with a view of exposing him? These boasted principles, then, of natural religion must, after all, be *taught!* The natural powers of man, uncultivated, cannot receive Christianity, as wanting those principles on which, according to Mr. *H.* it must be built.

The question then is, who shall be the teacher? are all the men of cultivated minds agreed in these principles? It is easy to call them *plain, unerring dictates*, but are not moralists of different countries, and even of the same countries divided about them? and *whose* authority or judgment shall be decisive, when they teach differently? — But let us make haste out of this subject, where difficulties rise so fast upon us, and all, from Mr. *H.*'s strong propensity to *uncommon and striking* observations.

We must not, however, leave these two before us, without advising Mr. *H.* to make them, in his next edition, more consistent with each other: and particularly to take care, that the *improved, enlightened age* in which Christianity was first planted, be not, in the first observation, pronounced to have had an unfavourable influence on it, as affecting to season it with philosophy, which was *the foundation of every*

heresy^a which corrupted the purity of the gospel so soon after it's establishment; that this improved, enlightened age, I say, be not thus reprobated in his first observation, while, in the second, it is represented as a peculiar, purposed advantage to Christianity, insomuch that it could not have taken root and flourished in any other.^b

We have now taken notice of all those important reasons, alledged by Mr. H. in support of his thesis, which he hath summed up in his 79th page, and must leave it to the judgment of the candid reader to determine whether they do indeed support it.

It will be expected perhaps that something be here said in vindication of the *Christian Apology*, against the accusation of it's holding correspondence with two professed enemies of the Christian cause.

And our defence is short and plain. The argument of the *Christian Apology* is not at all affected, by the concurrent suffrages of Bayle and Lord Bolingbroke, any more than by the dissent of the popish Huetius. Dr. P. being persuaded of the decisive authority of the scriptures, asserted to them by miracles, will readily subscribe to what even *infidels* have advanced in support of that authority; as he would readily subscribe to a *popish bishop* affirming the truth of the apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds. If Lord Bolingbroke was not sincere in what he hath pronounced with an air of sincerity, "That the mouths of all pretenders to reason might have

a P. 71.

b P. 78.

" been

“been stopt by refusing to reason about a revelation already proved to be divine,” his dishonesty doth not at all impeach the truth of his assertion. Nor need we dread, with Mr. *H.* any frightful consequences from resting the merits of the Christian cause on the single proof of the miracles recorded in the gospel-history. The *truth* of this history will still stand upon the firm basis of *the characters and qualifications of the historians*, and its *authenticity*, upon the *singular circumstances* with which their history hath been delivered down from the age of the historians, to our own.

Though, therefore, we reject *reasoning upon the matter* of revelation, and rest it upon its *external credentials*, let us not fear what Mr. *H.* hath threatened as a consequence of this rejection, that Lord *B.* *will presently get rid of the fact*. It standeth stedfast upon the basis above pointed at, and cannot be shaken. If that basis did not properly support it, if the Jewish and Christian histories were indeed *reveries*, no conformity of their matter, to *common notions*, tho’ it should appear with noon-day clearness, could stamp upon the doctrines the characters of truth and divinity.

Mr. *H.*’s *common notions* therefore, are so far from being the ONLY, that they are altogether a *false criterion*; so far from being endued with the wonderful power of distinguishing things from their identical selves, *sham miracles from impostures*; that they would not serve for, the

other part of the task he hath assigned them, the distinguishing true history from false, but would lead us to admit such narratives for *true* as were never offered to the world *under that character*, but professedly *framed* for entertainment; an end which every *fiction* will more or less attain, in proportion as the *matter* of it approacheth to, or recedeth from *common sense* and *probability*.

I will now beg leave to urge some expostulations in behalf of that *decisive proof* for which I have hitherto pleaded against Mr. H's arguments.

Let us ask then, whether, since the time that divines have joined issue with infidels upon this previous, *internal proof*, any thing effectual hath been done towards the silencing of these infidels? Have they been convinced by the arguments advanced, *that the matter of revelation is worthy of God*, and so, disposed to proceed to the examination of the *external proofs*? Or, do not they go on to *blaspheme that holy name whereby we are called*, denying the only Lord that bought them, and refusing to cast an eye upon the *external evidence* (agreeably to the concession of divines) till all *internal objections*, as they are called, shall be removed? and do not those objections weigh as powerfully in their minds as ever they did, after all the pains which our defenders have been taking to remove them? And do not these defenders help them to a justification of themselves, while they allow, that if the *matter* of a pretended revelation do not, throughout, *appear* to be worthy of God, and consistent with

with human apprehensions of things, it may reasonably be rejected as an imposture, notwithstanding *any* miracles *whatever*, wrought and appealed to in confirmation of it.

Let Mr. *H.* then seriously consider, whether this method of defence, however well it may be calculated for displaying wit and ingenuity, hath not begun a strife which is *as when one letteth out water*, and thrown the *foundations* of religion out of course, by resting it's evidence upon points which will for ever hinder it's cause from coming to an issue.

The two following illustrations will, I would fain hope, furnish satisfactory reasons, at least to Christian readers, for resting the proof of the reality of a revelation upon *external evidence*.

1. Let us suppose *Abraham* to have laid down to himself this rule, recommended by Mr. *H.* of *examining* communications pretended to come from God, by the test of *the plain, unerring dictates of common sense, the first and simplest principles of all morality and religion*. According to this plan of proceeding, *Abraham* must have suspended his assurance that the voice which commanded him to slay his son for a burnt-offering, that this voice was a real revelation, until he should have *examined the matter* of the command, by the principles of *natural religion*, to try whether it was not contradictory to, or at least not inconsistent with, any of them. Until this should appear to him, the *external evidence* of a voice from heaven was not to be allowed any weight to prove that God was the author of

of this command ; it might be a voice proceeding from the *prince of the power of the air*,

Abusing him, to damn him."

In this *examination*, he would soon meet with two principles, which Mr. H. will place high in the list of moral truths *written on the invisible tablet of our hearts*, "That parents are to love" and cherish their children ;" and, "That we" are not to commit murder." How, then, according to Mr. H's *examining system*, will *Abraham* be defended from the imputation of enthusiastic, or, to use M. H's favourite word, *fanatic* rashness, in receiving for a divine revelation, and obeying, a command so directly repugnant to the true criterion of revealed truths? Certain it is, that this procedure of *Abraham* was so shocking to a late reasoning divine of great hopes, who afterwards went into *Ireland*, that he scrupled not to say, "if he had been a justice of peace in the parish where *Abraham* lived, he would have put him in the stocks."

In vain will it be said, upon Mr. H's plan, in defence of *Abraham's* conduct, that he had reason to depend upon God's former promises, and to believe that God would raise his Son from the dead : this is supposing him assured that the command was from God, when it's failure on the test, it's repugnancy to the *first and simplest principles of all morality and religion*, compelled him to pronounce it an *imposture*. In vain also will it be alledged, that God may, in subsequent revelations, dispense with the prescript of

a *Shakespeare, Haml.*

his *primary revelation*: this is again supposing the dispensation to come from God, which, by the never-failing *criterion*, is demonstrated to be altogether unworthy of him; not to mention that God, having according to M. H. made that *primary*, the *touchstone of every subsequent revelation*, hath thereby abridged himself of the power of dispensing with it.

Now they who allow miracles to be decisive proofs of the reality of a revelation, will readily find a justification, and even a praise for the conduct of the patriarch. The miraculous voice assured him that the command was from heaven, and therefore he implicitly obeyed it, however his obedience tended, in all human probability, utterly to extinguish the pleasing hope which had been given him, and put the tenderest sentiments of nature to the forest of trials.

But this conduct can be brought to stand Mr. H's *ultimate test* only by resolving it into a *scenical representation*, (in which no trial of *Abraham's* resignation is supposed) or by some other fineness of that reasoning which vaunteth itself in the *province of paradox*.

2. Our second illustration for manifesting the necessity of resting the truth of revelation upon external proofs, is this.

Let us divide the inhabitants of the globe, as Mr. H. hath divided the globe itself,^a not into 30 parts, but into as many thousands as they may be supposed to consist of; and then let us enquire whether there be one person in each of

^a P. 25.

these thousands who hath any clear conception of this author's glaring *first and simplest principles* of morality and religion, or is at all qualified for this author's proposed examination into the *reasonableness of it's doctrines, and the worthiness of it's ends and purposes*. Now what is to become of those vast numbers who are thus incapable of examining? Was not *the gospel preached to these poor* and ignorant creatures, as well as to philosophers? And yet, according to this author's scheme, they are utterly excluded from all possibility of believing and embracing it. Will he tell us they are implicitly to *take philosophers for their guides*? This cannot be. He will not allow an *implicit* regard to be paid to what he acknowledgeth to be the word of God; much less then to the word of man. But supposing him to allow this, or rather (as his system will lead him) to contend for it: in this case, a new difficulty will arise. They must ask what *class* of philosophers they are to follow? Christians and infidels pretend alike to have tried this gospel by the test of reason, common sense, and natural religion; and though *Prideaux, Rogers, and Mr. Heathcote* declare it to be, in all it's parts, consistent with those *sacred canons*; *Shafesbury, Tindal* and *Morgan* will declare directly the contrary. How is the poor untaught soul to decide between the two parties? Bare asseverations are, on each side, of equal weight in the scales. These therefore cannot determine him. Is he then to examine their several reasonings, to find on which side the truth lieth? Alas! he cannot

read, nor hath the least conception of the meaning of the terms which make up their disputation. And if he *could* read, and understand, yet his life, were it of antediluvian length, would end before the controversy, which is now as much alive as ever it was, and leave him but partially acquainted with the pleadings of the several advocates, and consequently without any pretensions to give judgment upon the cause. Or if the whole pleadings lay actually before him, yet to suppose him able to determine the controversy would be to make him *wiser* than these philosophers who are *unable* to determine it, and who were, just now, appointed as his guides because he was *not wise enough*. In short these millions of the vulgar, yea and these philosophers also, however raised in their own conceit above the vulgar, must, if Mr. H's be the true *manner of proceeding*, remain in a state of invincible suspense during their whole lives; no life being long enough for opening and explaining, even though we were masters of the proper facts, the grounds and reasons of every act or purpose, or law of God recorded in the scriptures, so as to demonstrate against all objections, that it is *consistent with our notions of the divine attributes, and not contradictory to any manifest truths natural or moral.*^a

Nor is there any cure for this miserable uncertainty and suspense, but the decisive authority of those miracles which were *wrought and appealed to for this very purpose* of recommend-

^a Use of R. p. 40.

ing the revelations of God in the old and new testament to the reverential acquiescence of mankind.

And this will, indeed, be an effectual cure; for of these miracles all mankind are equally competent judges.

The old and new testament, which the most illiterate of the vulgar know to have been reverently received, at least as far back as their fathers, for the word of God, and which the learned know to have been delivered down under that character from the earliest ages of the Jewish and Christian church, with religious care and reverence, and constantly read in their congregations for informing them what God hath done for and requireth of men; this book recordeth a great number of astonishing and awful miracles, professedly wrought by the several messengers of these testaments, for ascertaining the divinity of their mission. And these miracles were such as every one's common sense must render him a proper judge of. The most ignorant, for instance, who cannot read, yet know perfectly what is meant when they hear another read, that Jesus Christ did, in the presence of multitudes, make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the dead to come to life again, and that almost every thing that he did, or said, or suffered, was exactly conformable to what the prophets had foretold of the promised Redeemer: and what remaineth but that the *multitude glorify the God of Israel?*^a

^a *Matt.* 15. 31.

And,

And, when these facts are reported to them by an history, *whose tokens of veracity and authenticity are peculiar to itself, and not to be paralleled by any other history*, what remaineth but that, like the Israelites, *Exod. 4. 31. the people believe; and when they hear how that the Lord hath visited the race of mankind in their bondage to sin and Satan, (of which the bondage of the children of Israel was a typical representation) and looked upon their affliction, that they bow the head and worship, and with implicit reverence receive his informations and commands, thus authenticated, and with implicit affiance obey those ordinances which he hath instituted in his church for redeeming them; for bringing them out of the house of bondage unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem?*^a

We must not conclude this justification of the *Christian Apology*, without obviating three insinuations by which Mr. H. hath endeavoured to discredit the plan of it: the first is, that the doctrine advanced by it is new-fashioned; the second, that it tendeth to inculcate a spirit of ignorance; the third, that it would explode the use of our intellectual powers.

(1.) For disculpating it from the charge of novelty, all that is needful is to refer the reader, for it's contested principles, to the works of reputable Christian writers.

These principles are, that it is vain and arrogant to call the matter of supposed revelations attested by miracles, to the test of human rea-

^a Heb. 12. 22.

son, because it is supposing human conception able to trace out all the reasons of God's acts, all the realities of the nature of God and the nature of things : and particularly, with regard to the bible revelations, that the miracles wrought in confirmation of them are, exclusively of any internal evidence, plenary proofs of the divine origin of these revelations, because no man ever did or can do such miracles except God be with him.

For both these positions, largely maintained in the *Christian Apology* and in the foregoing pages, I will beg leave to refer the reader to the late bishop of London's first pastoral letter.

“ When a revelation, saith he, Sect. VII. is
 “ sufficiently *attested* to come from God, let it
 “ not weaken your faith that you cannot clearly
 “ see the *fitness* and *expediency* of every part of
 “ it. This would be to make yourselves as
 “ knowing as God, whose wisdom is infinite,
 “ and the depth of whose dispensations, with
 “ the reasons and ends of them, cannot be fa-
 “ thomed by our short and narrow comprehen-
 “ sions. God has given us sufficient capacity to
 “ know him and to learn our duty, and to judge
 “ when a revelation comes from him ; which is
 “ all the knowledge that is needful to us in our
 “ present state. And it is the greatest *folly* as
 “ well as *presumption* in any man to enter into the
 “ *counsels of God*, and to make himself a judge
 “ of the wisdom of his dispensations to such a
 “ degree, as to conclude that this or that revela-
 “ tion cannot come from God, because he can-
 “ not

“ not see, in every respect the *fitness* and reason-
 “ ableness of it: to say, for instance, that either
 “ we had no need of a Redeemer, or that a bet-
 “ ter method might have been contrived for our
 “ redemption; and upon the whole, not to give
 “ God leave to save us in his own way. In
 “ these cases the true inference is, that *the reve-*
 “ *lation is therefore wise, and good, and just, and fit*
 “ *to be received and submitted to by us, because we*
 “ *have sufficient reason^a to believe that it comes*
 “ *from God.*^b For so far he has made us com-
 “ petent judges, inasmuch as natural reason in-
 “ forms us what are the *proper evidences* of a di-
 “ vine revelation. But he has not let us into
 “ the springs of his administration, nor shewn
 “ us the whole compass of it, nor the connexion
 “ of the several parts with one another. Nor,
 “ by consequence can we be capable to judge
 “ adequately of the fitness of the *means*, which
 “ he makes use of to attain the *ends*. On the
 “ contrary, the *attempting* to make *such* a judg-
 “ ment, is to set ourselves in the place of God,
 “ and to forget that we are frail men; that is
 “ short-sighted and ignorant creatures, *who know*

a The sentence immediately following this sheweth plainly
 that by *sufficient reasons* his Lordship meant *proper evidences*, a-
 mong which he doth not, in summing them up in the *next sec-*
tion, include the *internal*.

b Mr. H. in his 63d page hath argued, that because God hath
 in two particular cases, where he explaineth his dealings, appeal-
 ed to the reason and judgment of men for the equity of those
 dealings with them, therefore it is his will that they should ex-
 ercise that reason and judgment upon his dealings with mankind
 in all cases. A species of fallacy in reasoning which is very com-
 mon and taking with superficial understandings.

“ very

“very little of *divine matters* farther than it has
“pleased God to reveal them to us.”

What his Lordship judged to be the *proper evidences of a divine revelation* is seen in the following (8th) section where they are reckoned up as followeth, 1. Types. 2. Prophecies. 3. The general expectation of Christ's coming at that time. 4. The miracles he wrought. 5. His predictions, which were punctually fulfilled: and 6. The speedy and wonderful propagation of the gospel after his death. “But *all* these, saith he, “*tho' in themselves cogent and conclusive* are not “equally plain and clear to every capacity.” For this reason his reader is thus advised: “Fix “your mind stedfastly upon the testimony of “*facts* which are undeniable, and upon consequences flowing from them, which are plain “and obvious to the meanest capacities” — “But “let your chief regard and attention be to the “miracles, those mighty works which were “wrought by Christ and his apostles. For this “is in it's nature a more *sure*, plain, and easy “proof, which the meanest capacities are capable of apprehending and entering into; and “which therefore was evidently intended to be “a principal means of convincing all mankind “of the truth of Christianity.” — “They who require greater testimony of a divine mission and “power than those I have mentioned under this “eighth general head, “*are never to be satisfied.*”

a *Viz.* the testimonies summed up in the beginning of this paragraph, which, as the reader hath seen, are all *external*.

My second authority for vindicating the doctrine of the *Christian Apology* against the charge of novelty, is the acute and judicious Mr. *Leslie's*, who did not seem to have the least apprehension that Christians or infidels would ever require better or other evidence of the truth of Christianity, than it's miracles, when, in his *short method with the deists*, he took it for granted that all mankind would join issue with him upon the proof of their reality.

“First then I suppose, saith he p. 4. That
 “the truth of the doctrine of Christ will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact which
 “are recorded of him in the gospel be true;
 “for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth
 “of what he delivered.”

The same is to be said as to *Moses*. If he brought the children of *Israel* through the *red sea* in that *miraculous* manner which is related in *Exodus*, and did such other wonderful things as are there told of him, *it must necessarily follow* that he was sent from GOD: these being the strongest proofs we can desire, and which every deist will confess he would acquiesce in if he saw them with his eyes. Therefore *the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.*^a

So little, as we have intimated, did this excellent divine once dream that any infidel, much less that any minister of God's word would arise, who would presume to assert that the miracles

^a One might refer the reader for this doctrine to almost every author who hath written upon the evidences of the gospel.

of Christ might possibly be wrought *through the prince of the devils*, unless the reason of man should set it's seal, that the *doctrines* taught by Christ *may be* divine revelations.

The question is not what deference Mr. *Heathcote* will pay to the opinions of these divines now cited, but whether those opinions do not coincide with the doctrine of the *Christian Apology*, so as to vindicate it effectually from the charge of novelty.

But whether this charge might not be in some measure retorted upon Mr. *Heathcote's examining doctrine*, from Mr. *Leslie's* so entirely leaving it out of the question, the candid reader will judge.

Many authors have, indeed, occasionally asserted the doctrines of Christianity to be highly worthy of God; but these expressions have been meant of it's *moral* doctrines, whose excellency is obvious to all, and were not intended to subject every procedure, every ordinance of God for the salvation of mankind, to the verdict of the reason, i. e. the fluctuating opinions, of men.

Mr. *Heathcote's* second charge against the *Christian Apology* is that it tendeth to inculcate a spirit of ignorance.

Nothing is easier than to rail and call names, and, as this writer hath done, to vilify an adversary through whole pages, in consequence of one's own misrepresentations of him. And if readers were not apt to be surprized and carried away, like the *candid* compilers of the critical review, by strong assertions, false facts, and tri-

umphant epiphonemas and exultations upon a fancied victory; if all who read were wont to call for reasons, as they go along, of the assertions they meet with, there would be no need to say one single word in abatement of this charge.

If there be any such thing as a *spirit of ignorance*, it must be so lazy, listless, slothful a spirit, that one would not willingly be thought to be any friend to it: it is really neither more nor less than a spirit of falling fast asleep. While the senses are awake, they cannot help adding *something* to the stock of our real knowledge, by bringing in the ideas which are the materials of it. Indeed fancy maketh some efforts towards it, even whilst we are asleep, and suggesteth sometimes a croud of notices which, if they were *true and real*, would bring no inconsiderable information to the understanding. But the misfortune is, that they are all *dream*, and vision, and reverie, and that, however fixedly they might seem to exist in our slumbers, they will not stay the touch, but fade and vanish away before our waking faculties.

Now the *Christian Apology* is so far from inculcating or encouraging this *dreaming spirit*, this contemplation of *unreal mockery*, this *bending of the eyes on vacancy*, that one great aim of that sermon was to call men off from it, and to engage their time and abilities in the examination and comparing of *real ideas*, painted in the mind, not by the pencil of fancy, but by that of truth and nature; that so the understanding may

may be stored with *real* knowledge, and not remain emphatically *ignorant* while she conceiteth herself to be *filled with knowledge as the moon at the full*.

To this purpose, the sermon hath taught that the only *real* information which the mind attaineth by reasoning, is and must be grounded upon the knowledge of facts or realities; and that all other discoveries of truth are nothing better than fantastical knowledge, a knowledge concerning harpies, centaurs, gorgons, chime-ra's. ^a

All the learning which the sermon can be supposed to decry is that which concerneth the study of divinity; and the only reason why it can be accused of decrying learning *there*, is because it would banish metaphysical reasonings from this study — would establish the religion of Jesus Christ on it's own foundation, and not rest the proof of any article of it on such a process, as will not serve to investigate and ascer-

^a The schoolmen gave to all ideas which do not enter *from without*, into the mind, but are *created* there, the name of *entia rationis*, *beings of reason*. But then they generally confined this denomination to the tribe of imaginary *material substances*, to harpies, gorgons; centaurs, hirco-cervus's, chimera's &c. little aware that most of the ideas which themselves with infinite pains and subtilty were, for ever, delineating, defining, dividing, distinguishing, limiting, comparing, belong to the fantastic tribe. And all these speculations of our metaphysicians, the *modern schoolmen*, concerning the nature and duty of man, and the nature and agency of God, which proceed *without facts only communicable*, or *beyond facts* actually communicated, by HIM in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, ^b upon what are all these fine speculations built, but upon *beings of reason*?

^b Col. 2. 3.

tain any *real* truth whatsoever. The conclusions of abstract reasoning, however justly deduced, will not add one grain, as hath been proved, to the measure of our *real* knowledge, unless the ideas compared in it be known to have some realities in nature which they represent.

Now the realities belonging, for instance, to the nature of God cannot be known by any human power of perception; nor, since the world began, hath it been seen that any philosopher did ever find out the being of a self-existent, infinitely wise, and powerful, and just, and good spirit, the creator and preserver of all things, by reasoning either upwards from *effects*, or downwards from *antecedent necessity*; however it may have been the trifling task of many writers, even since the light of the glorious gospel hath shined upon us, to attempt the demonstration of it from natural principles; an attempt as wise and as thankful, as if he to whom a kind friend hath discovered a hidden treasure, should set his faculties to work in endeavouring to make it appear, that he could have found the treasure by his own search, if it had not been pointed out to him.

But the true account of this matter is this: *no man hath seen God at any time*; and therefore that his existence, nature, and attributes, *his power, his glory, and the mightiness of his kingdom* might, as far as was expedient, be known unto men, and the glorious works of the creation referred to him as their author, God hath revealed these facts or realities to mankind, speaking,

at

at sundry times and in diverse manners in times past by the prophets under the patriarchal and Jewish œconomy, and in these last days by his Son.

The author of the *Christian Apology* would, for these reasons, refer the student in theology for a proof of the existence, nature and attributes of God, not to the argument *a priori* of Dr. Clarke, nor to the arguments *a posteriori* of Locke and Wollaston, but to those passages of his word upon which the first of the thirty nine articles of the church of *England* was founded. And it must be observed that in this article he will find certain assertions, built upon that authority, relating to the triune subsistence of the Godhead, which are entirely excluded out of the demonstrations of the philosophers above-named, who therefore cannot be said, even supposing those demonstrations conclusive, to help us to a knowledge of the true nature and attributes of God.

In a word, the true foundation of Christian theology is the book of God; and all those parts of learning which may really serve as handmaids to this queen of sciences, may assist us in tracing out the truths of that book, or effectually enforcing them, so as to give them their perfect work upon the hearts and consciences of men, these are not, in the sermon, by any means exploded, and are here heartily recommended to the student in theology.

That abstract, metaphysical reasonings do not avail to this purpose, hath perhaps already appeared,

peared, and may farther appear to any one who shall turn to *Aquinas's summa theologiæ*, and after he hath read some of the curious disquisitions of that subtile wit, concerning the nature, and the modes of perception, and the knowledge of *angels*, shall ask himself whether he really *knoweth* one tittle more about angels than he did before he read those fine demonstrations. The reason why they do not convey knowledge is, that the ideas they employ, however accurately compared, are fantastic ideas, having no known correspondence with any realities in the nature of angels. Now the ideas concerning God, on which metaphysical demonstrations of his being and attributes are founded, are liable to the same exception, and the only ground of the preference which Dr. *Clarke's* metaphysics claim over those of *Aquinas* is, that the former are not yet out of vogue.

After what hath been said, the reader will not be surprized that we exclude theological metaphysics from among the branches of true learning. It is that kind of *degenerate* learning which, according to Lord *Bacon*, "did chiefly reign among the schoolmen, who having sharp and strong wits, but knowing little history, either of nature, or time, did out of no great quantity of matter and infinite agitation of wit, spin out unto us those laborious webs of learning, which are extant in their books. For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff, and is
" limited

"limited thereby. But if it work upon *itself*,
 "as the spider worketh his web, then it is end-
 "less, and bringeth forth, indeed, *cobwebs of*
 "*learning*, admirable for the fineness of thread
 "and work, but of no substance or profit."

The materials then of true learning are known facts and history; and as the facts relating to God cannot be known but by revelation from him, all that theology is but *cobweb-learning* which the mind of man doth not receive from thence, but *spinneth from itself*; and that only is true theology which worketh upon *the matter*, upon *divine history*; whether it be that *written volume* by which he hath communicated to mankind what he thought fitting to communicate concerning his nature, acts and purposes; or the *volume of nature*, those works of his creation which he hath displayed before us as memorials and standing tokens of *his invisible things*, even *his eternal power and Godhead* revealed from heaven.

The third article of Mr. H's charge is that the sermon tendeth to explode the use of our intellectual powers. And yet, his only reason for asserting this is, that it hath cautioned the understanding from entangling itself in a trackless thicket; from attempting to fill the perforated tub, from spinning cobwebs, or unraveling them already spun, which are *of no substance or profit*; from affecting to soar on metaphysic wings into the void regions of abstraction, where

all at once
Fluttering her penons vain, plumb down she
Ten thousand fathom deep; [drops
and hath exhorted her to exert herself in the
search of true learning, by *working upon matter,*
and limiting herself thereby, especially in search-
ing after that truth, which is, of all others, the
most concerning; that truth, which is the *life e-*
ternal of those who so know it as to embrace
and trust in it.

The sermon then hath not exploded the use
of our intellectual powers in religion, but hath
directed them to their just object and exercise,
the enforcing Christian truths by their own Christian
arguments, and building the proofs of the divine
origin of the gospel on the sure foundation of
facts, communicated to us either by history, or
by revelation.

And let the reader determine whether he doth
not endeavour most effectually to explode the
use of the intellectual powers, who contendeth
for employing them in trifling, fruitless subtilties,
instead of stable, effective reasoning: and whe-
ther the strength of *Hercules* was not more like-
ly to be totally enervated by inveigling him to
spin at the distaff, than by tasking him to those
manly exercises for which his limbs were natu-
rally formed.

Mr. *Heathcote* will probably be surprized that
nothing hath been hitherto said concerning Mr.
Hutchinson, to whose books and principles he

John 17. 3.

hath

hath cunningly traced the doctrines of the *Christian Apology*, as to their fountain. And he will probably be still more surprized when he is told that the author of that sermon, having no acquaintance with Mr. *Hutchinson's* writings, freely confesseth that he is utterly unqualified to stand forth in defence of them, even against such a reasoner as Mr. *Heathcote*, if he had offered any thing argumentative in opposition to them.

The life and conversation of some of his professed admirers, which I have been for some time a witness of, cannot, indeed, give me unfavourable impressions with regard to those principles, whatever they are, which inspire that true Christian seriousness, those sentiments of piety, that chearful innocence of manners, that uniform earnestness to promote the honour of God and the salvation of mankind, that unwearied zeal to recommend the steady application of the ordinances of our pure and apostolic church, as the divinely appointed means of obtaining a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with all it's blessed *fruits unto holiness and the end everlasting life* — Such principles cannot be pernicious to religion, and if, in some instances, they shall be found erroneous, (which neither I nor any man hath a right to pronounce till we have duly examined them) their errors must be harmless. Would to God the same character could be given of every theological system, which hath of late years solicited for the inventers and maintainers of it, the applause of the learned! That all the fine arguments, demonstrations, remarks,

observations, discourses on the subject of Christianity with which this age hath been *entertained*, had been professedly directed to the promoting of true religion in the *hearts* of men! had not sought to gratify an unprofitable curiosity, a raging taste for novelty, instead of rousing the careless consciences of an age which lieth sunk in sensuality, dissipation, and the love of this present world; instead of seconding their master's important errand, in calling sinners to repentance! He whose preaching hath not this great end in view, (and no one can have it in view but he who hath first called *himself* to repentance) he whose heart is not kindled by the flame of true charity, the never-failing, heaven-directed love of all mankind, a tender, affectionate, earnest desire of the salvation of every soul for which Christ died — this man, though he should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, though he should *really* understand all mysteries, and all knowledge of the highest antiquity, is but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal, pleasing, perhaps, to the ear, and amusing to the fancy, but tending rather to sooth the sinner's fatal slumbers, than to awaken him to righteousness.

I will now take a *final* leave of Mr. *Ralph Heathcote*, whose outrageous insolence, unfair citations, and misdirected, inconclusive arguments should not have engaged, as they do not deserve, so much of my time, if this fashionable kind of reasoning were not apt to warp the judgments of less attentive readers. The glory
of

of having refuted this author is not, indeed, worth the pains, but it is amply so to endeavour to revive and establish the apostolical plan of Christian preaching, which hath the fairest chance for inculcating the true spirit of Christianity, and for banishing that self-preaching which hath of late years threatened to quench it, and to erect an unaffecting, speculative religion in it's stead.

It is said that some *ingenious* persons have spoken well of his performance, but this if true, will only prove that one may attain the character of *ingenious*, without the faculty of distinguishing strong assertions and glaring paralogisms from just reasonings.

But indeed this is not an age in which one must hope for candid and sober judgments, especially concerning books written on religious subjects. Few readers are to be found who examine while they read, and who determine to hear both sides before they pronounce upon a controverted point. Even they who assume the title of CRITICAL REVIEWERS will frankly confess, after all their professions to the contrary, that they give their account of an author's doctrines and principles, from the representation of his adversary, and taking it for granted that this representation is just, will, without hesitation, break out into bitter revilings of the writer, for a work which, by their own account, they have never read.^a

^a See their account of Mr. Heathcote's book in their number for April 1756.

If I return once more to Mr. H. it is to conjure him by all his hopes of everlasting happiness to think more worthily and justly than he seemeth to think of that lively, *energetic faith*, to which the scriptures admonish us to *trust entirely* for salvation,^a but which he who exhorteth Christians to trust to, is by Mr. *Heatcote* charged with enthusiasm and fanaticism.^b

Let him but take his idea of the nature and spirit of Christianity, not from the fancies of the ingenious, who have been affecting to surprise by new discoveries, but from the sincere word of God, and he will perceive, (if he earnestly seek to know the truth) that the gospel of Jesus Christ was intended for an infinitely more important purpose than to improve our moral knowledge; and that Christianity is not truly understood, even by the wise and penetrating, till it's good seed hath taken root in their *hearts*, till it hath begun to wean their affections from this world, and to make them know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. He will then perceive that by whatever proofs the word of God is recommended to our *intellectual* faith, yet if another faith do not spring up within us, that word will, after all, prove unfruitful. While the vanities and follies of the world, while the raging thirst of pleasure, or wealth, or honour keep

^a The just shall live by his faith, *Hab. 2. 4. Rom. 1. 17. Heb. 10. 38.* By grace ye are saved *through* faith.

^b Use of R. p. 101.

possession of our desires; while pride, or malice, or self-conceit disdain to yeild to a meekness and lowliness of heart, which our blessed Saviour is ever ready to teach us by the silent instruction of his good spirit; vain and trifling to us are all our examinations of his doctrines, all our arguments for their truth. They may, by God's grace, convince others, they will not convince ourselves; we are yet to seek for true faith in Christ, and the true meaning of his gospel. He only who is disposed to do his will, shall truly know of the doctrine whether it be of God. The knowledge which availeth unto salvation, (which alone perhaps deserveth that name, because all other knowledge shall vanish away) is to be sought not "inter sylvas academii," in the woods, the endless intricacies of SCEPTICAL disputation, but in an honest, and good, and penitent heart, inflamed with an earnest desire to hear, and a steadfast purpose to obey the will of God.

a *Christ. Apol.* p. 7. The reader will observe that to decry *Sceptical disputation* is by no means decrying *true learning*. This kind of disputation flourished among the *academicks*, a sect of philosophers who professed to maintain no opinion of their own, nor to seek the truth, but to oppose or patronize opinions, only in opposition to others. Their rule was, *disputare pro omnibus, & contra omnia.* Cic.

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 the words of the scriptures of scripture;
 but in an heart, and good, and pure heart, in-
 flamed with an earnest desire to know, and a firm
 self purpose to obey the will of God.



a Christ. The Lord will observe that to deny
 faith is to deny the means of saving. This
 kind of distinction is not among the wise, a test of
 philosophers who pretend to maintain no opinion of their own,
 nor to seek the truth, but to oppose or pervert opinions, only
 in opposition to others. Their rule was, "I will not be
 as you are."

FLW 1.2